

**SPACE AND ACADEMIC IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN A HIGHER EDUCATION  
CONTEXT: A SELF-ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY**

by

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## **DECLARATION**

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SPACE AND ACADEMIC IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN A HIGHER EDUCATION  
CONTEXT: A SELF-ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

I declare that the above thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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**LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

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<b>AQIP</b>	Academic Qualifications and Improvement Programme
<b>CAES</b>	College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences
<b>CAQDAS</b>	Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
<b>CEDU</b>	College of Education
<b>CEMS</b>	College of Economic and Management Sciences
<b>CLAW</b>	College of Law
<b>COD</b>	Chair of Department
<b>CSET</b>	College of Science, Engineering and Technology
<b>DISA</b>	Department of Institutional Statistical and Analysis
<b>HE</b>	Higher education
<b>HEI</b>	Higher education institution
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology
<b>NRF</b>	National Research Foundation
<b>ODL</b>	Open Distance Learning
<b>PWFH</b>	Professors working from home
<b>SACTE</b>	South African College of Teacher Education
<b>SHDRIC</b>	Senate Higher Degrees, Research and Innovation Committee
<b>UCGH</b>	University of the Cape of Good Hope
<b>UNISA</b>	University of South Africa
<b>VUDEC</b>	Vista University Distance Education Campus

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## **SUMMARY**

Following the postmodern discourses of spatial conceptualisation, this study examined the manner in which space in an Open Distance Learning (ODL) University enables or constrains academics' work as they go about the process of constructing their academic identities. Focusing on academics' engagement in one college of the University, the study was premised on the assumption that, in the current higher education (HE) dispensation, academic identity construction presumes and demands the existence of supportive space for academics to effect the academic practices. Lefebvre's (1991) social production of space and Soja's (1996) Thirdspace were used as lenses to examine the multiple dimensions of space in relation to spatial practices in the College, the spatial policies and the experiences of academics as the users of the Institutional space. Qualitative ethnographic research methods that were used to collect data included a review of the Institutional policies, intranet posts and emails; the observation and photographing of academics' offices and administrative office space; observation of departmental meeting proceedings and the conducting of semi-structured interviews with academics of different academic ranks. Findings suggested that although some forms of space are supportive of spatial practices that contribute to academic identity construction, the imagined space of the ODL Institution can be unfairly inclusive and inconsiderate of academics' unique spatial needs. Such inclusivity of space seemed to be inconsistent with the appropriate ODL space as imagined by some participants where academics may work comfortably and with limited restrictions. The study concluded by making recommendations on how the Institution and the academics may manage space for optimal academic identity construction in the College.

### **Key terms**

Space; higher education; academic identities; Open Distance Learning; academic practices; spatial practices; spatial policies; Imagined space; Thirdspace; metaphorical space.

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## CHAPTER 1

### ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

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#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

*Space may be thought of as an absence of presence, as a vast emptiness... Alternatively, it may be thought of socially, in terms of the ways that we and past and present others have filled it with meanings and presences, or denuded or denied it through determinate absences... which future generations might inherit. Its materiality has social meanings. For instance, a room may have a view, four walls, and a ceiling and floor, but that tells us nothing about it unless we know what meanings it contains, represses, opens up, or resonates with (Kornberger & Clegg 2004: 1095-1096).*

Space and academic identity construction are two concepts that are hardly ever discussed in conjunction with each other in higher education (HE) literature on Open Distance Learning (ODL). Yet, in the contemporary dynamic HE context, where academic identities are similarly dynamic, academic identity construction presumes and demands the existence of supportive space in which academic staff can effect the tasks through which they construct their academic identities. A number of factors said to affect academic identity construction in HE have been identified in the literature. These factors include inter alia time (Anderson 2006; Clancy 2010; Gonzalez, Martinez & Ordu 2014; Gornall & Salisbury 2012; Oyetunji 2013; Perraton & Creed 1999; Ylijoki 2013), work load (Anderson 2006; Gonzalez et al. 2014; Unal & Oztuk 2012) and neoliberal managerial demands (Adam 2012; Hyde, Clarke & Drennan 2013; Kogan & Techler 2007; McInnis 2010; Ylijoki 2013; Winter 2009). Space is rarely mentioned in relation to academic identity construction and, although researchers like Aslam (2013), Bligh (2014), Kok, Mobach and Omta (2011), and Temple (2007; 2009; 2014), recognise space as an issue of interest in HE, they focus their attention on its effect on students and how students experience space. In their research, there is little focus on how space is experienced by academics or specifically how it influences them in the process of constructing their academic identities in a HE context.

Furthermore, where research has been done on academic identity construction in HE and the factors that influence this process, this has been conducted mainly in relation to contact institutions. Little has been done to understand the process or the factors that affect academic identity construction among staff in ODL contexts. In pursuit of contributing knowledge to fill this gap, this study examined the manner in which space in an ODL university enables or constrains academics' work as they go about the process of constructing their academic identities in the University.

This chapter is an orientation to the study and it is composed of nine major sections (including this section) as follows:

- Motivation and background to this study which highlight global changes in HE as well as my own experiences that triggered the idea for embarking on this study;
- A section that describes the study location, namely the University of South Africa (UNISA), and outlines the context of the study by expanding on practices in the Institution that may possibly have an effect on academic identity construction. Also, in this section, a key concept of the study, space, is contextualised based on the spatial theories from which the concept is drawn for the study;
- The research problem statement is presented in the fourth section together with the research questions;
- The aims and objectives of the study are presented in the fifth section;
- The methodology followed in the research process is presented in the sixth section;
- Major concepts of the study are clarified in the seventh section;
- The demarcation of thesis chapters is presented in the eighth section;
- Closing remarks are provided in the last section of the chapter.

## **1.2 MOTIVATION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

This study was motivated by a number of interconnected issues related to both my personal experiences as well as my observations of the existing conditions in HE. Firstly, when I was doing my Master's degree (Madiya 2010) I was privileged to be involved in a research project in which I interviewed academics in different higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa on issues related to the trends in postgraduate research conducted in the first ten years of democracy in South Africa (1995 to 2004). An issue that arose during the interviews which interested me was the tension felt by some academics concerning changes in their work environments. These academics noted the progressive shift in discourses related to the role, position and status of HE in contemporary society. Later I realised that their concerns were not unique because HE literature identifies similar changes in the global HE environment. Having also experienced the relationship between the workspace and the demands of academe referred to by the academics, I was curious to explore the perspectives of my colleagues in this regard. Consequently, in this section I first review literature to present, firstly, a comprehensive summary of the HE changes mentioned by the academics whom I interviewed and the perceived effect of these changes on HE and academic identities. Secondly, I relate these changes and academic work to the workspaces according to my experiences of HE workspaces and academic practices.

Enders (2006: 13) notes that the academic profession had been known over the years for a high degree of job satisfaction based on extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. Those rewards include "status, social position within society, a high degree of job autonomy and freedom in the use of time, a low degree of job prescription and control, the possibility to do challenging and interesting work, the satisfaction with the content of one's work and reputation among scholars" (Enders 2006). Those rewards are so significant to academic staff that they overshadow the comparatively low salaries earned in academe. Recently, changes have challenged the traditional status of HE and academic staff. These changes relate to massification, a loss of academic freedom as well as an increase in corporatisation, accountability and quality assurance.

Since the 1990s governments worldwide have called for a considerable expansion of the opportunities for access and participation in HE, especially by those who were once

excluded for political and economic reasons (Altbach & Forest 2006: 1; Kerry 2012: 2; Sehoole 2006: 977; Trow 2006: 13). The increase of the opportunities for access and participation in HE, a process referred to as massification (Kerry 2012: 1), implied dramatic increases in student enrolments in some contexts (such as historically white institutions (HWIs) in South Africa) and a decrease in other contexts (such as historically black institutions (HBIs) in South Africa) (Sehoole 2006: 977). Universities that were once ivory towers (Barnabè 2004; Barnett & Di Napoli 2008; Bentley, Habib & Morrow 2006; Coaldrake & Stedman 1999; Hyde, Clarke & Drennan 2013; Kogan 2004; Trow 2006), known for serving only the elite in limited numbers had to open for mass and universal access. Such massification meant an increase in the workload of academic staff.

In South Africa the process of massification was part of the national HE transformation agenda that followed decades of apartheid education and the exclusion of some population groups from full participation in and access to HE (Sehoole 2006: 978). HE in the democratic era in South Africa has a mandate to address issues of equity and to be responsive to social needs through offering relevant curricula content, relevant focus, adequate delivery modes and research that would produce relevant knowledge for the needs of the market and society (Sehoole 2006).

Massification and the mandate to produce social responsive curricula have held implications for academic freedom (freedom to teach, to learn and to do research) and for the academic profession generally. The implication was that new disciplines were developed in the institutions to respond to societal demands and other disciplines viewed as nonessential were discontinued (Clegg 2008: 330; Enders 2006: 13). This process led to the specialisation and compartmentalisation of knowledge as compared to the traditional “shared beliefs and mutuality across institutions” (Enders 2006: 6; cf. Becher & Trowler 2001). In other words, the compartmentalisation of knowledge changed the collegiality and autonomy as previously understood in academe (Clegg 2008: 331).

Further, governments and industry have become interested in the nature and quality of programmes offered in HE. That interest emanated from the perception that HEIs should not only open for masses but should also produce a well-educated workforce that would

contribute to the development of national economies. This interest influenced academic practices to the extent that research became the most prominent focus in academe, a process that raised concerns about the relationship between research and teaching as was assumed in academe (Clegg 2008: 332). For example, some academics whom I interviewed in the project I was involved in for my master's study raised concerns that the requirement to engage in and produce research outputs was disquieting since they regarded themselves as teachers, not researchers. Adendorff (2011: 307) notes the situation where even the institutional powers began to disvalue the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and this situation put academics with the inclination and abilities to pursue the SoTL at risk in relation to appointments and promotions since the latter are determined by research scholarship. The prominence of research over teaching raised another requirement in HE: academics had to obtain doctoral degrees (Schulze 2014). This was a major problem raised by some of the academics I interacted with during my study. They indicated that they had never contemplated engaging in doctoral studies before such changes and impositions.

Based on their intrinsic values and rationales as indicated, governments demanded accountability on the part of HEIs (Nicholson 2011: 1). As a consequence, HEIs have had to develop performance measurement standards such as an Integrated Performance Standards System (IPMS) and new reporting requirements as a way to ensure that they meet the demands of both government and industry, the primary external funders of HE. This need for accountability and quality assurance has led to institutions competing for external resources, students and academic staff (Adam 2012: 71; Clegg 2008: 332; Hyde, Clarke & Drennan 2013: 13; Kolsaker 2008: 513; Shin & Kehm 2013: 1). As a result, institutions started to follow the corporate model of governance and a neoliberal attitude in which profit making has become the major concern and in consequence, academic practices are commodified.

Contemporary academics are expected to produce as much research as possible and develop programmes that attract as many students as possible to the university to augment and strengthen the finances of the institution. As it were, students become customers and staff members are sales consultants (Radder 2011; Tight 2013; Vuori 2013; Vally 2007: 20; Woodall, Hiller & Resnick 2014). As indicated, collegiality, academic partnering and interactive communities of practice among staff have become

less important due to the attitude of competition brought about by these changes (Vally 2007: 21; cf. Hawkins, Manzi, & Ojeda 2014; Tight 2014; Winter & Sarros 2001). Each academic's work is quantified into how many articles, books and other research outputs have been produced and published; the student throughput rate; how many students are registered for a course and how many masters and doctoral students the individual academic is supervising. The question that may be asked in relation to this study's topic is how this summary of HE changes relates to institutional space and this question is addressed next.

In response to the HE changes and requirements related to teaching, research and work load, there was a simultaneous growth in faculty numbers while resources remained either stable or declined (Enders 2006: 7); cf. Mohamedbhai 2008: vi; Mahomedbhai 2014: 61). Such resources include space in the physical dimension<sup>1</sup>. Offices and administrative office space required for the execution of academic work became insufficient in some contexts. According to my experiences, which I share next, the insufficiency of space for academic work has a direct effect on the progress made during an academic's day.

While I was involved in the project mentioned earlier I was also contracted as a lecturer at the university where I was studying. As a contract lecturer as opposed to a full-time lecturer, I was obliged to share an office with other colleagues. At times I shared one office space with three others. Due to our different schedules in relation to student consultation and other day-to-day activities, we had little privacy or time alone. This experience affected us not only in terms of the physical space; we also did not have enough academic preparation and thinking space within the physical space that we shared. In addition to the effect of different time schedules, different personal and individual preferences, such as using the heater or fan, playing music in the background and the like while working, also affected us significantly. For example, if one person thought or worked better with soft music in the background, those who needed complete silence to think or do any academic work were affected. As such, we would sometimes choose to work at home or, if possible, to work in the office after hours.

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<sup>1</sup> The multidimensionality of space is described in section 1.3.



When I arrived at my present Institution, UNISA, I found that some of my colleagues were also obliged to share offices due to the shortage of office space. I wondered if they had similar experiences in an ODL Institution to those I faced in a contact institution. Moreover, I was also curious to understand if office space was a matter of concern at all in an ODL Institution and how space, generally, was experienced in the Institution in view of the increasing demands on HE as described above. In addition to the general HE changes, the Institution was also undergoing its own contextual changes at the time when this study was conceptualised. A new college, the College of Education (CEDU) had been established. That spatial restructuring led to the establishment of additional departments in the CEDU, with the appointment of new Chairs of Department (CODs), to whom offices needed to be assigned. Many academics were required to relocate from their existing offices and departments to other offices and departments closer to their new CODs. Later on, the problem of the shortage of offices on the main campus led to the need to move some academics to another university-owned building which is located in the city, off the main campus<sup>2</sup>. The question was whether such relocation and distances had any significance at all with regard to academics' identity construction and freedom to engage academically and work with colleagues in the different ways as required by their profession.

To meet the operational needs of the newly fledged College, additional academics and administrators had to be recruited. Some of the new incumbents were appointed to senior positions, such as that of professor and senior lecturer. Physical space had become so limited that an increasing number of academics were obliged to share offices. Full professors were provided with the option to work from home as an initiative instituted by the university to alleviate the shortage of office space in the CEDU and in the wider university context. On the other hand, according to university policy, academics and non-academic staff members are obliged to be in their offices on weekdays from 7:45 to 16:00, unless they take academic or vacation leave. A clock system is used to manage and ensure compliance with this regulation. Recently, the policy has been amended to allow academics and other staff members to work flexible hours within the university's range of flexibility as stipulated in the policy (UNISA, Policy

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<sup>2</sup> As the college was continuously trying to address the problem of space during the course of this study, some academics were moved back to the main campus and others to other off-campus buildings.

on official working hours 2013). Allowance is made in the amendment for staff and their line managers to agree on flexibility in relation to working hours. However, the proviso is that a total of 8 ¼ hours must be worked per day – a total of 40 ¼ hours per week. In other words, the length of time academics are required to be in the office is stipulated. In contrast, academics working from home are not linked to the clock system and compliance with the above regulation is not controlled.

From the issues discussed here it can be concluded that the manner in which academics are expected to function in HE is influenced not only by university structures and systems, but also by issues and bodies or organisations external to the university. The way academics function is also influenced by the identity which is assumed by the institutions in lieu of the role they are expected to fulfil in society. Therefore, even if academics are not satisfied with the changes and demands they encounter in the field, there is little they can do to change the situation. What the institutions may do is to provide academics with adequate space in which to think, reflect and work securely. Indirectly the provision of the necessary space by institutions to enable these activities may contribute significantly to the fulfilment of the institutional goals which are informed by external demands as discussed earlier. In addition, that space may facilitate or limit the development of academics' professional identities.

Even though the concept of academic identities is not easy to define (Feather 2010), literature suggests that it is associated with academic practices such as teaching and research, academic citizenship, community engagement (CE), academic leadership, postgraduate supervision, mentoring and related practices (Billot 2010; Churchman & King 2009; Evans & Nixon 2015; Feather 2010; Findlow 2012; Hanson 2009; Henkel 2005; Jawitz 2009; Madikizela-Madiya 2014; Moeng 2009). The argument that this study brought forward was that while there is much research on academic identities and the formation of these identities in HE, little research has been done that seeks to understand the relationship between the practices related to academic identities and the effect of space (as a multidimensional entity) on the execution of those practices, especially in ODL contexts. In the context of this study this dearth of research is problematic because the Institution in which the study was conducted is undergoing complex contextual changes as alluded to earlier and detailed in the next section. Such changes affect not only the practices that define an academic in the Institution but they

also affect spaces in which those practices are executed. However, it is not known whether such changes pose as threats or as opportunities to the academics in the Institution.

### **1.3 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

This study was conducted at the University of South Africa (UNISA), the sole dedicated ODL university in southern Africa. The history of UNISA is traced back to 1873 when the University of the Cape of Good Hope (UCGH) was established. The UCGH started off as an examining body for Oxford and Cambridge Colleges in the United Kingdom (UK) and, by itself, did not offer tuition. It was in 1916 that the UCGH changed the name to the University of South Africa, and as it became known, UNISA. In 1946 UNISA began the process of tuition through distance education. It focused only on tuition, with very little focus on research. With time, UNISA, with its vision of being the “African university in the service of humanity”, started to be viewed as having an “obligation to ensure that it is an incubator of research and innovation activities that provide solutions to issues affecting South Africa and the continent” (UNISA College of Law 2013). In other words, UNISA has moved from focusing only on tuition to research, community engagement (CE) and related academic practices in a similar way to many other contact and ODL universities.

The South African Ministry of Education commenced the restructuring of the education sector in the country after democracy was instituted in 1994. In 2001 UNISA incorporated the South African College of Teacher Education (SACTE). In 2004 it also merged with Technikon South Africa (TSA) and the Vista University Distance Education Campus (VUDEC). Some of these institutions functioned differently from the way universities, especially UNISA, did. The implication therefore was that staff members from the merged and incorporated institutions had to rethink their identities to meet the expectations and requirements of their new employer and academic environment.

One of the priorities of the merged Institution was the promotion of research. Although there is no policy that stipulates the prioritisation of research in the Institution, there are actions that suggest it as such. For example, in 2012 UNISA introduced the practice of putting aside a week each year to celebrate research and innovation initiatives by its

academic staff members. Since then, the office of the Vice Principal for Research and Innovation has been actively encouraging academics to do research that places them beyond local recognition and which ensures international acclaim. Research output is also incentivised, which encourages research pursuits. Although tuition is also incentivised in the Institution, research incentives encourage a refocusing from solely tuition to research.

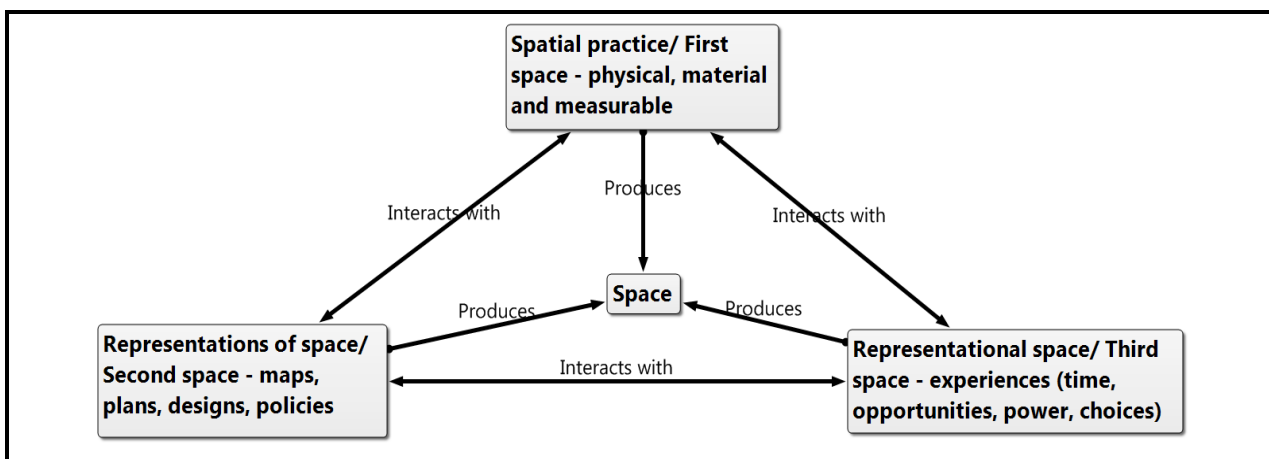
Moreover, academics at UNISA are encouraged, through financial support, to further their studies and to obtain doctoral degrees. Among the objectives of this support as mentioned in the policy on the Masters' and Doctoral support for UNISA, permanent employees (UNISA 2013: 1) are to:

- address the problem of an ageing research-productive cohort;
- accelerate the development of the next generation of researchers;
- support transformation of the research cohort;
- increase the number of researchers eligible for National Research Foundation (NRF) rating;
- enhance the competitiveness of UNISA against other HE and research institutions; and
- increase the number of UNISA employees who are eligible and have capacity to mobilise external research grants.

These objectives suggest that even though the Institution has been dedicated to teaching in the past, the importance of research and the preparation of an experienced and prominent research cohort is being recognised and actively pursued. Research is mandatory for academics and the policy explicitly states that the Institution is placing itself in competition with other research institutions and is aiming for researchers who will bring external grants to the Institution. The website of one college within the university makes a comprehensive summary of the Institution's aim in this regard stating that UNISA aims to "increase the per capita research output, to increase the throughput of master's and doctoral students and to increase the number of doctorate degrees by staff members" (College of Economic and Management Sciences [CEMS] April 2013).

On the other hand, while UNISA academics are encouraged to be competent researchers, teaching demands are also increasing in the Institution in accordance with the general move towards the massification in HE. According to UNISA's Department of Institutional Statistical and Analysis (DISA) (2010) UNISA has become the biggest university in South Africa with approximately 300 000 student enrolments. These student enrolment figures increase annually. For example, the total student enrolment in the College of Education (CEDU) rose from an increase of 19.7% in 2011 to 23.096% in 2013. What these micro and macro changes imply for academics at UNISA, especially in relation to space, was the core matter of concern and focus of this study. The brief conceptual account of space as adopted and used in the process of this study is the focus in the rest of this section.

In this study a postmodern discourse of spatial conceptualisation is followed. Such postmodern conceptualisation of space is informed by two major substantive theories, namely the social production of space by Lefebvre (1991) and the Thirdspace by Soja (1996). These two theories both oppose the modern spatial discourse in which space is regarded as a *tabula rasa* in which actions take place (Merrifield 1993). Instead, space is triadic, an active commodity and comprises perceived space (physical, concrete space with material existence, Firstspace), conceived space (mental space or representations and imaginings of space, Secondspace) and lived space (social practices that are a complex combination of perceived and conceived space, Thirdspace) (Lefebvre 1991; Soja 1996). These three dimensions of space are said to exist dialectically and all need to be acknowledged if an appropriate space for all people, their practices and identity construction is to be produced. Figure 1.1 below summarises Lefebvre's spatial triad.



### **Fig. 1.1 Lefebvre's conceptual triad (adapted from Milgrom 2008: 270)**

Lefebvre problematises the taken-for-grantedness of space and opens a new window for the interrogation of the role of space in influencing social practices and interactions. Karlsson (2004: 330) presents a summary of Lefebvre's concept of space and argues that people "live, produce and reproduce themselves and their social relations, their power and the powerlessness of others, in, with and through...space." Because space influences social practices and interactions, Lefebvre (1991: 158) advocates for the realisation that all people have a right to participate in decision making about the production of space. People also have a right to what he refers to as appropriation, that is, the right to physical access, occupation, use and production of space that meets the needs of all. Referring to Lefebvre's view about participation and appropriation, Purcell (2002: 103) argues that space should be produced in a way that allows the actualisation of these rights for those who inhabit the space. Therefore, the utility value of space should take precedence over its economic value (cf. Boer & de Vries 2009).

Although Lefebvre and other spatial theorists such as Soja (1996) and Purcell (2002) direct their theorisation to urban spaces, especially people's rights to the city, their arguments are regarded in this study as applicable to many, if not all, spaces that are produced or utilised by people. For example, the main concern of these theorists about cities that they operate as strategic sites for the processes of commodification and profit making (Brenner, Marcuse & Mayer 2009) is similar to the concerns raised in HE at present, where academic practices are similarly commodified. But how the spatial triad is manifest in a university context is a matter that yet needs to be defined.

A university's physical space takes the form of offices, seminar rooms, libraries and other buildings and specific areas used by academics for teaching, research and related spatial practices. Although the quality of physical space has been shown to significantly affect achievement (Marshall et al. 2015), job satisfaction (Newsham et al. 2009) and well-being (Guite, Clark & Ackrill 2006), the physical space used by academics, as indicated, is one dimension of space to which limited attention has been paid by researchers in the field of HE, particularly in ODL institutions.

In a HE context, space is also conceived (second dimension of space) as the form of spatial designs and policies that regulate the use of the physical space. Referring to

policies about urban space, Boer and de Vries (2009: 1327) argue that when the majority of people in a city participate in the design of policies, plans and changes in the city, then their right to the city would have been realised. However, Boer and de Vries (ibid) note that most often such policies and decision making takes place behind closed doors by those in authority, this way limiting the inhabitants' [right to] participation in the decision making process and appropriation of the designated space. In a HE context there are also policies that regulate the use of the physical space. When the views of academics about how such policies enable or constrain their practices for academic identity construction are known and taken into account when decisions are made about the provision and utilisation of space, their right to enabling space will have been realised. This brings the discussion to the third dimension of space.

The physical space and the conceived space are acknowledged in any organisational context. What is usually overlooked is the manner in which those who occupy and utilise the space experience or are engaged in it. The experienced space is the third dimension of space which was of interest in this study. The interest in this study, however, was not only on how academics experience the physical space and the policies that regulate such space. In addition, the conception of the experienced space was extended to include a metaphorical aspect which has to do with academics' autonomy and power to choose what and how to do things that develop their identities as academics within the physical and the conceived dimensions of space as provided for in their academic environment. Metaphorical space also includes opportunities that become available for academics to grow academically, time to think and critically reflect, and be innovative and creative (Le Roux 2008; Pinto-Coelho & Carvalho 2013). This study focused on these three dimensions of space as informed by spatial theorists.

During the development of my research, I realised that the study of space cannot omit issues of power because power is inherent in the appropriation and utilisation of space (Lefebvre 1991). As such my analysis of how space affects academic practices and academic identity construction included examination of power issues in space. Interest was on identifying the modalities of power that exist within the multiple dimensions of space in the university. More on the issue of power is presented in Chapter 2.

## 1.4 RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

UNISA is an ODL Institution and as indicated, research regarding the use of and experiences about space and academic practices in ODL contexts is limited. Although ODL may be thought of as implying openness of space (and time) especially for teaching (and learning), and other academic practices, its openness may not be taken-for-granted with regard to its influence on academics' daily practices. This caution is more important for UNISA where the ODL context has not yet led to complete virtual communication between students and lecturers, compelling lecturers to be present in their offices daily to attend to students' needs. In addition, since UNISA is not exempt from the HE changes discussed earlier, research needs to be conducted to establish prevailing perspectives and experiences regarding the enabling and constraining effects of space on academic practice and identity construction. There is a dearth of research on this issue despite the fact that all academic practices towards academic identity construction involve space in one way or another. This is a concern because institutional policy makers may develop policies that may lead to contrary outcomes from the institutional goals related to academic work. Although, according to Temple (2014), it is difficult to generate empirical evidence on how space affects output and outcomes in a HE context, in this study it was assumed that people's perspectives and experiences on the influence of triadic space (See fig. 1.1) might shed valuable insight in this regard. As such, the following question was set to guide the direction of this study.

How does space in a specific ODL context enable or constrain academic practices around which academics construct their identities?

The subsidiary questions for the study were:

- How is academic identity understood and constructed in a specific College of the ODL Institution?
- How is space conceptualised in the College?
- How do the Institutional and the College policies define and relate to the utilisation of space?
- How do academics' personality traits influence their response to the Institutional and College policies on space?



- How should space be managed or created for optimal academic identity construction in the College?

The expectation was that this study would not only assist in establishing descriptive information on how different dimensions of space affect the construction of academic identities in the Institution concerned. Instead, the assumption was that findings from this study might also be useful for reflection on the development of adequate policies regarding spaces for academic practices. In addition, it was assumed that during the course of the research, there would be the prospect to open up a space for academics to reflect on and around their academic practices (cf. Schön 1983). In so doing they would transform experience into understanding individual values and goals and their unique situatedness in the academic community. Reflection is an indispensable process for academic identity development (Schön 1983). Therefore, by creating such space for reflection, this study would be indirectly and directly contributing to academic identity development in the Institution. It was also expected that participants would have different perspectives on the influence of space on the construction of their academic identities and that they might learn from each other's different experiences of space from the findings of the study.

## **1.5 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The general aim of the study was to examine how space in an ODL context enables or constrains academic practices around and through which academics construct their identities.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Examine ways in which academics understand and construct academic identities in a specific College in the ODL Institution;
- Analyse the manner in which space is conceptualised in the College;
- Describe ways in which the Institutional and the College policies define and relate to the utilisation of space;
- Examine the manner in which academics' personal traits influence their response to the Institutional and the College policies on space;
- Suggest ways in which space can be managed or created for optimal academic identity construction in the College.

The methodology that was followed in the process of this study is presented in the following section.

## **1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research design, the research approach and the methods that were used as well as the sampling process to select participants from whom data was collected for this study is presented in this section.

### **1.6.1 Research design and approach**

The research design directs the course of the study and is a plan, procedure or guideline according to which the research will be conducted in order to find answers to the research questions. Trafford and Leshem (2011: 34) mention critical thinking as a significant process involved in developing a research design. Such thinking is not only about how the research will be undertaken, but includes also the philosophical and

technical foundation of the arguments to be made in a study such as a doctoral thesis. Furthermore, the selection of participants, data gathering techniques and data analysis are critical dimensions of any research design.

This particular study followed a qualitative approach. Briefly qualitative research is described by Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 3) as “a situated activity” in which a researcher is located in the world of inquiry. In other words, a qualitative approach calls for the collection of data directly from the people concerned and in their natural setting. Also, one of the significant characteristics of qualitative research is the use of distinct designs which include ethnography, narrative and other methods (Creswell 2013: 10). Ethnography is a qualitative research design in which the researcher interacts and observes the participants in order to understand their lived experiences of the topic in question in a natural setting (Creswell *ibid*).

As such, in this study a self-ethnographic research design was followed since the intention was to obtain the perspectives of participants directly from my work place. Self-ethnography is a relatively new concept within ethnography which will be discussed at length in the research methodology chapter, chapter 4. Ethnography, according to Whitehead (2005) is more than just methods, but like other research designs it is grounded in a certain ontological and epistemological paradigm. Epistemology, according to Ormston, Spencer, Barnard & Snape (2014: 2), provides the philosophical grounding for a researcher to decide on the kinds of knowledge that are possible and the ways of ensuring adequacy and legitimacy of such knowledge. Ontology on the other hand is described by Crotty (1998: 10) as “concerned with ‘what is’, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality.” After Whitehead (2005: 5), ethnography in this study is understood as sharing ontology with other qualitative philosophies that ‘reality’ varies on the basis of environmental factors and that, epistemologically, knowledge is an “intersubjective product of the researcher and the research.” Therefore such knowledge may be acquired through interaction with people who have direct experience of the research issue (Babbie 2010; Bryman 2012; Ryan, Coughla & Cronin 2007; Marshall & Rossman 2011; Punch 2005). Because of this epistemological underpinning, this study required the identification of information rich participants who would provide as much information as possible towards exploring and answering the research questions. However, in this study I did not rely only on the subjectivity that underpins

ethnographic design. I also analysed the Institutional policies and observed practices to interpret and draw conclusions in relation to the relationships between space and academic practices for academic identity construction. The steps followed in identifying research participants for the study are outlined below.

### **1.6.2 Sampling strategy**

From the six academic colleges at UNISA, two were initially selected purposively for this study. These were the CEDU and the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CAES). The CEDU was selected because it is the College in which I lecture. It would therefore be convenient for me to observe and be part of all practices and activities that take place in the College. The CAES was selected: this College is spatially separated from the main campus; thus I considered it an apt choice to allow comparison.

The target population comprised all academic staff members in the two colleges who were involved in teaching, research, and related academic practices. This population included academics on all academic ranks namely junior lecturers, lecturers, senior lecturers, associate professors and professors, irrespective of their positions or designations within the colleges. The identification of participants only took place after permission for the study had been obtained from the University Senate Research and Innovation Committee (SHDRIC), the Executive Deans of each of the two colleges and the Chairs of Department (CODs) in the colleges. An email was sent to all academics in the departments in the CEDU and the CAES explaining the purpose of the study and requesting them to voluntarily participate in the research. In total eight departments in the CEDU and two in CAES volunteered participation in the study. However, I later realised that CAES did not fit well in my research design because I failed to obtain sufficient participation from different categories of academics in the college. As such, it became impossible for me to access all the information I needed from the two departments in CAES and consequently, I decided to focus my study solely on the CEDU.

Non-probability volunteer sampling was used to acquire individuals to participate in the study. To obtain specific biographical, logistic and demographic information about the research participants who would volunteer their participation, a questionnaire was

attached to the email inviting involvement in the study. The questionnaire sought academics' biographical particulars and information regarding academic responsibilities and logistics, such as the number of modules taught; the largest number of students enrolled in a module; the number of articles, books and/or book chapters published in the last three years and designation in a department. In total twenty of the total number of 119 academics volunteered their participation in the study. The participants represented a variety of ranks and designations. They included:

- Four lecturers who were still working on their doctorates. One was employed on a short term contract;
- Four professors working from home;
- One professor working on campus;
- Six senior lecturers;
- One lecturer who had recently obtained a doctorate;
- Two professors chairing departments;
- Two professors managing units within the college.

Among these participants, some had their own offices (either on campus or off-campus), some were sharing offices, some had shared offices before and some had worked without offices. This meant that my research sample included the dimensions on which I hoped to base my study.

### **1.6.3 Data collection methods**

Three methods were used to collect data for this study. The first of these was the review of documents relevant to the study. Policy documents that related to the allocation and utilisation of the Institution's physical space, time management and academic freedom were analysed to understand their relationship to academic identity development and the utilisation of space in the Institution and the CEDU. These policies as well as all documents that were analysed for this study are listed in chapter 4. I also analysed the College and departmental emails notifying academics about issues relevant to their academic responsibilities and their working conditions. I requested the departments who were represented in the study to add my name to departmental mailing lists to ensure

that I received all relevant emails sent and received in the departments for the duration of my study. This way I became an ad hoc member of the participating departments.

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews of about one hour with each participating academic were conducted. Furthermore, participating academics' offices and administrative office space were comprehensively observed. The aim of observations was to document the material artefacts in the physical space, the changes that academics made to the space; seating arrangement and arrangements of objects – both work related or otherwise; movement through the space and daily activities that academics undertook in their physical space. The ambient conditions of the space were also noted. In most cases the observation of the physical space was done simultaneously with the interviews. The observations involved photographing and making field notes. In addition, departmental and the College meetings were also attended to observe the proceedings and to listen to the discussions related to academic work.

#### **1.6.4 Data analysis**

Atlas.ti (version 7), a Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) programme, was used as a tool to support the process of data analysis. The process followed Friese's (2014) advice and started from coding the data from all data sources. Then categories and themes were developed (see details in Chapter 4).

#### **1.6.5 Ethical considerations**

Any research project conducted at UNISA must be cleared by the college ethics committee. If the research involves UNISA staff or data, once clearance has been obtained at a College level, ethical clearance has to be sought at the Institutional level through the Senate Higher Degrees, Research and Innovation Committee (SHDRIC). It is only after such clearance has been granted that research may commence. The process in terms of this research proceeded as follows:

- Ethics clearance for the study was sought and obtained from the CEDU Research Ethics Committee (REC).

- Permission to conduct the research was requested and obtained from the SHDRIC.
- Letters seeking permission to conduct the study were sent to the Dean and the Office of Graduate Studies and Research at the CEDU and the Chairs of Departments (CODs) in the colleges.
- Academics from the college were informed of the study and its purpose and were invited to participate voluntarily.
- From the responses, I approached all the volunteers and requested them to sign informed consent forms relating to their participation in the study. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the process of the study and that their participation was voluntary. Their right to withdraw their participation without reprisal was stated.

However, because the research design is self-ethnographic, ethical consideration had to include more than just the anonymity of participants. Following Trowler's (2011) suggestions, the names of participating departments were not mentioned in the research to further anonymize the participants and protect them from the possibility of being identified. The characteristics and implications of self-ethnography will be discussed in depth in chapter 4.

## **1.8 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION**

The major concepts that frame this study include space, ODL, academic identity, power and personality traits.

### **1.8.1 Space**

Space is a multidimensional phenomenon that is physical, conceived and experienced (Lefebvre 1991; cf. 1.4). Detailed explanations regarding the concept and its various dimensions are provided in chapter 2.

### **1.8.2 Open Distance Learning (ODL)**

There is no one definition for ODL; however, the definitions do generally have common characteristics that include reference to the separation of teacher and learner in terms of time and space, two way communication, the use of mixed media courseware, and open access to learning. Aligned with the UNISA policy on ODL, this concept is understood in this study as referring to:

*a multi-dimensional concept aimed at bridging the time, geographical, economic, social, educational and communication distance between student and institution, student and academics, student and courseware and student and peers. Open distance learning focuses on removing barriers to access learning, flexibility of learning provision, student-centredness, supporting students and constructing learning programmes with the expectation that students can succeed... (UNISA, Open Distance Learning Policy 2008: 2).*

Key considerations contained in this definition include removing the barriers related to time and distance between the institution and students and the facilitation of flexible learning among students.

### **1.8.3 Academic identity**

In this study the term “academics” was used to include those members of staff who are involved in teaching, research and related academic practices, regardless of their post levels (such as junior lecturers, lecturers, senior lecturers, associate professors and



professors) or designation such as full-time lecturers, contract lecturers, chairs of departments or members of departments.

It is acknowledged that the concept of academic identity is complex (Henkel 2005; Quigley 2011; Winter 2009) and is highly contested. Some understand it as comprising “the discipline taught; the level at which teaching [takes] place; institutional factors, including the historical background of an institution; the institution’s teaching and learning culture; and facilities to support teaching and research, its location, and its ethos” (Smith & Nyamapfene 2010: 116). In this study, academic identity relates to what academics do; what they should do; what they can do and what they want to do (Prof G. Kamper, personal communication, 2012). In other words the core of my understanding of the term was that academic identity is associated with the identity constructed as a consequence of participation in academic activities that include tuition, research and related academic practices.

#### **1.8.4 Power**

Power is difficult to define because of its diverse meanings and conceptualisations. In this study, power is viewed after Foucault (1982: 781) as a social phenomenon that refers to the abilities and possibilities to influence or be influenced by own or others’ actions in a particular society.

#### **1.8.5 Personality traits**

Personality traits can be described as people’s emotional and social characters in relation to their reactions to circumstances they encounter in life (Komarraju & Karau 2005: 558).

### **1.8 DEMARCATION OF THE THESIS CHAPTERS**

Chapter 1 has provided the background to and context of the study. The research problem statement, as well as the aim of the study, were outlined. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework of the study where theories of space, power and academic identity are presented.

In Chapter 3 I review literature related to how physical space influences practice. The second section of the chapter outlines how organisational space is conceived and how that conception influences practice. Third, the influence of perceived space on practice is reviewed, first in relation to general organisational work and then to academic practices. The fourth section focuses on what literature says about ODL contexts and spatial practices. This section includes a review of experiences related to academics working from home as outlined in literature. The fourth section looks at academic identity construction within the triadic space of the university.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to discussing the research design of the study. This chapter includes the detailed discussion of the self-ethnographic research design and the methods that were followed to collect data for this study.

In Chapter 5 findings on how both policy and participants define the concept of academic and how academic identities are constructed in the CEDU are provided.

In chapter 6 the discussion focusses on the conceptualisation of space in the college both in policy and by participants.

Chapter 7 presents findings on how policy defines and relates to the utilization of space in the CEDU. In other words, findings on what policy says about the different dimensions of space and how participants relate to policy stipulations are presented in chapter 7. The second section of the chapter discusses the manner in which academics' personality traits influence their response to policy as they construct their academic identities in the CEDU.

In chapter 8 the research findings are discussed, and then followed by the research conclusions and recommendations.

## **1.9 CLOSING COMMENTS**

In this chapter an orientation to the study that examines the perspectives regarding the effect of an ODL university space on academic identity construction was presented. The rationale for the study was presented, followed by the statement of the problem to be

investigated. A brief account of the methods that were followed in the study design as well as in the actual process of data collection was also mentioned. For the purposes of allowing a similar understanding of the concepts used in this study, clarification of major concepts was made, followed by the presentation of what should be expected from the next chapters on this thesis. The next chapter presents the conceptual framework of this study which is drawn from the theories of space, power and academic identity.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SPACE, POWER AND ACADEMIC IDENTITY

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#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The major concepts around which this study was conducted were briefly introduced in Chapter 1:1.8. These concepts included, amongst others, space, academic identities and power. In this chapter the theories from which these concepts were drawn are discussed in relation to their relevance to this study. The chapter is composed of four major sections as follows:

- The first section deals with spatial theories, presenting the different perspectives and conceptual understandings of the concept “space”. The emphasis in this section is on the work and views of Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1996) whose conceptions about space influenced the process of the analysis of the manner in which space enables or constrains the execution of academic roles in the Institution.
- The second section focuses on reviewing theories on power, particularly in relation to space and academic identity construction. The decision to attend to power issues was influenced by Foucault’s (1982; 1985; 1993) position that power is dispersed. The underlying assumption was that, if this were the case, power in HE space might be an issue that needed to be considered when examining the effects of space on academic practices and academic identity development. I also noticed that the major spatial theorists whose works were referred to in the study, such as Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1996), highlight the inherent power relations in space. Their perspectives are also reviewed in the section.
- The third section looks at the concept of academic identities to examine how literature relates and positions academic identity (or not) to space and power. As per the topic for my study, in this third section the focus is on the academic identities of academic staff (and not that of students) in the contemporary literature, especially that which relates to space.

- The last section of the chapter draws together, in closing, the major discussions dealt with in this chapter.

## 2.2 PHILOSOPHISING SPACE (AND PLACE AS SPACE)

*Place presents itself to us as a condition of human experience. As agents in the world we are always “in place”, much as we are always “in culture”. For this reason our relations to place and culture become elements in the construction of our individual and collective identities (Entrikin 1991: 1).*

I find this statement by Entrikin interesting because it supports the assumption underlying this study that one's existence is inextricably oriented in space and culture and as such, in the context of this study, space has the potential to enable or constrain academic identity development in a HE context. Entrikin, however, speaks of 'place' and not 'space', while 'space' is foregrounded in this study. The question then is how the two concepts, space and place, relate to or differ from each other.

Agnew (2011: 1) suggests that both space and place are about “the ‘where’ of things” but have historically been conceptualised as having different meanings. Agnew (ibid) traces the historical debates and thoughts about the distinction between space and place from the nineteenth century and notes that at some point place would uncontroversially be regarded as “the physical place” and space as phenomenally where place is located. In this sense Agnew (2011: 6) argues that “Place is specific and location (or space) is general.” Other viewpoints regard place as a definable entity, with latitude, longitude and other spatial identifiers while space “is constituted by the impact that being somewhere has ...” on an individual (Agnew 2011: 3). In this case, Cresswell (2004: 1) refers to the sense of place, that is, the emotions and feelings that a place invokes on individuals or groups. Soja (2002: 114) argues that when the critical analysis of space (and place) considers only the mappable aspects and mental thoughts, it is a “binary logic” with significant limitations. Thus, the postmodern analysis has begun to theoretically eliminate the historical binary gap between the cognitive space and the mappable place as suggested in the descriptions above (Agnew 2011: 17). In this regard Agnew identifies four theoretical viewpoints in which the two concepts are placed

together. These are the Neo-Marxist school of thought, which is best represented in the work of Lefebvre (1991), the humanist or agency view, which is traced from the work of Tuan (1974), the feminist perspective espoused mainly by Massey (1999) and the performative perspective, which is represented in the work of Thrift (1999) (Agnew 2011: 17, 18).

Of these viewpoints Lefebvre's is discussed in detail in this section because it is the one from which the conceptual framework of this study derives. However, it should be pertinently stated that this study adopted a postmodern metatheory (detailed in Chapter 4) and that, although Lefebvre's viewpoint about space was followed to conceptualise space, the study did not follow Lefebvre's Neo-Marxist paradigm. The reason for not taking a neo-Marxist position was to 'unlimit' the study's analysis of power and space as will be discussed later in this section. In addition, although Lefebvre, as a Neo-Marxist, rejected the notion of postmodernism (Taylor & Winqvist 2001), his work influenced the postmodern thinking about space, especially for scientists such as Soja (1996).

Merrifield (1993: 516) lays a background of Lefebvre's (1991) work on space noting that in the 1980s, interest regarding the concept of place reappeared amongst human geography theorists and researchers. However, Merrifield argues, such interest revealed "deep-rooted philosophical and methodological shortcomings" on engaging in empirical research on the concepts of place. For this problem he blames the failure by many researchers and theorists to state or to construct their ontological understandings of place. Such failure led to "the formulation of a dialectical approach to the question of place and so trapped much research on place (often unwittingly) within a restrictive Cartesian philosophical straitjacket" (Merrifield 1993: 516; Buser 2012; Wilson 2013).

Briefly, Cartesianism is a school of thought established by René Descartes, a French scientist and philosopher whose main philosophical and methodological basis and intention was to extend mathematical methods to the human sciences. He emphasised, among others, the entire disconnect between material/physical (body) and mental (mind) substances and averred that these two were only connected through God's intervention (Skirry 2006; Merrifield 1993). According to this Cartesian ontology, the place had no relationship with human consciousness or thought but could only be

understood through the use of scientific methods. It is this dualism that led to Lefebvre's contention and the conception of the three parts of space. Thus, the concept 'space' is used by Lefebvre and the postmodern scientists to eliminate the demarcation between space and place as has been conceptualised.

Lefebvre, according to Merrifield (1993: 519) believed in "the unity of knowledge and the total character of reality." According to Lefebvre, space is not a single entity but "a dialectical triad" that is "produced" by the coming together of interdependent dimensions in a generative process. These dimensions are discussed in the following sections.

### **2.2.1 Perceived space/Spatial practice**

In describing the perceived space Lefebvre (1991:38) states, "The spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it." Shortly, his view is that each society produces its own space through spatial practices. In other words, as particular human practices take place within certain spaces in a society, those practices become "approved" or taken-for-granted to be practices belonging to that space. Thompson, Russell and Simmons (2013:66) describe the perceived space as referring to "what can be done, and is done, within the physical space perceived by the senses." Similarly, Wasserman and Frenkel (2011:505) define it as relating to:

*...the social logic of the organization of the space, or to zoning: who sits where, who sits next to whom, how one moves between spaces, how accessible or inaccessible the various spaces are, and how the organization of the space influences interpersonal interactions.*

This dimension of space is material, socially produced, can be measured and described empirically (Soja 1996: 66). However, although this dimension of space is physical, it also gets produced through continuous territorialisation, which is spatial practice as constituted within a specific social context. For example, in a HE system there are disciplinary "territories" or boundaries and "tribes" (Becher & Trowler 2001) which are people's practices and which produce space for the institutional community. Also, some

academics may have individual offices, some may share offices, some may work from home. All this is a process of producing space as it is not necessarily permanent even though physical.

In addition, Temple (2009: 212) is of the opinion that universities' physical space may contribute to the creation of a sense of community, a place that characterises the ways in which people live, what they do, how they understand themselves and what they know or think they know. In this case space is producing – it produces practices that happen in it. Temple's statement is thus significant for this study in the sense that university space in the context of UNISA stretches beyond the physical geographical location of university buildings, to academics' homes and communities where some academics work on academic activities. It is interesting therefore to listen to and understand UNISA academics' view of this dimension of space in relation to how it enables or constrains the sense of community as suggested by Temple.

Soja (1996: 70) interprets Lefebvre's perceived space as the Firstspace (see figure 1.1 in Chapter 1: 1.4). He defines the Firstspace as a product that gets produced the same way as other production processes of social life. Therefore to understand its influence on academic practices, Firstspace should be viewed together with the other dimensions of space because it is also not apolitical (Lefebvre 1991). In fact Soja (2010) has even included space in the discussions about spatial justice, an indication that politics and power is inherent in space.

### **2.2.2 Conceived space/Representations of space**

The representations of space, according to Lefebvre (1991), is a mental space – the space as discursively represented by scientists, planners, managers, architects, designers, artists, urbanists, social engineers and others. The representations are manifested in maps, plans, designs, and policies (see also Thompson et al. 2013). Lefebvre argues that this space is comprised of representations of power and ideology. Similarly, Foucault (1985: 337) mentions space as amongst the “symbolic mediums” that transmit certain information and from which power relations should be identified. This contention about power and space emanates from the metaphorical Panopticon, a metaphor of space control and surveillance which was developed by Jeremy Betham in



the eighteenth century and was developed by Foucault (1977). Simon (2005: 2) argues, “In its most concrete form, the Panopticon is a socio-material template for institutional orders of all kinds ranging from prisons, to schools, to factories, to hospitals”. Such Panopticon is located in the representations of space. It is in the representations of space that decision makers showcase their ideologies and power as underlain by their various agendas. For example, Saar and Palang (2009: 8) argue that different ideologies influence the concrete space by producing particular kinds of buildings (e.g., in a city). This shows how the two dimensions, physical and mental space, are interconnected. Saar and Palang then argue that the ideologies in the mental space also influence people’s practices related to concrete spaces. For example, they mention an instance of such an influence at a national state level. Saar and Palang (2009: 9) argue:

*State creates the images of places by constraining everyday life by deciding what activities are allowed at certain times of the day or night, who may or may not be seen on the street, what forms of public behavior are permitted and which are not... State is empowered to regulate everyday life in the public spaces of the city but, not only, the state also regulates our private life by punishing us for playing loud music at night etc. State’s presence is at the same time visible and invisible through various institutions like the police, social workers, surveillance cameras, systems of licensing and permits, standards for constructions etc.*

The state in this example may be likened to any organisation or institution and a consideration of how different policies within an institution regulate daily practices may be made. A clock system in an organisation or institution may be used as an ever present presence of the management and power of such institution or organisation. This view is supported by McKerrow (1999: 279) who regards conceived space as “the world of maps and directions” that are socially planned to manage the utilisation of space. McKerrow also notes the implication of “power and difference” in the representations of space which he likens to language that tells people “where to go and how to get there.” Wasserman and Frenkel (2011: 3) are of the same opinion that the “values, tastes and interests of the powerful groups” are always implicated in the conceived space.

Saar and Palang (2009: 9) mention an example of space planned by the state to cause conflict between the state and individuals in the state. They maintain that even though the state may regulate the use of space by individuals and groups in one way or another, people's actual practices do not always conform to those regulations. They often have alternative ways of using space. This can be likened to a case where some academics feel more comfortable working from home than in offices on campus (more on this in Chapter 3).

For Soja (1999) the conceived space is the Secondspace and it is the space as cognitively and conceptually written and/or contemplated. Both Lefebvre and Soja assume that the binary confinement on the physical and mental space only marginalizes the "experiential complexity, fullness and perhaps unknowable mystery of actually lived space" (Soja 1999: 268). People also have their mental maps of space which may be different from the one mapped by authority or power and which also differ from person to person as well as culture to culture (Tuan 1979: 389). As such, a third dimension of space is discussed next. Soja refers to this as the Thirdspace while Lefebvre refers to it as representational space or lived space.

### **2.2.3 The lived space/representational space**

The representational space is the social space, the space that an individual produces from interactions with others, with the physical space and with the conceived space. It encompasses people's feelings as well as the way people live in the physical space on a daily basis (Kuhlenbeck 2009). Individuals have subjective experiences and interpretations, associated images and symbols of the same space. Therefore, representational space refers to "the world as experienced by human beings through the practice and imagery of their everyday lives. These are spaces as experienced by their inhabitants rather than as conceived by external observers" (Thompson et al. 2013:66; cf. Tyler & Cohen 2010; Wasserman & Frenkel 2010). It is through the lived space that any society comprises of "deviations, diversity and individuality" (Soja 1980: 210). The way in which Löw (2008) defines the lived space clarifies this deviation, diversity and individuality that Soja mentions here. Löw (2008: 28) argues that the lived

space has the ability to defy orders and discourses to imagine and sometimes develop other spaces.

The lived space, according to Löw, questions the societal condition instead of taking them at face value. This suggests that within the same university or college where people are managed through the same spatial policies, individuals and/or groups may have different experiences of the same space, physically or abstractly because it is not everyone who will have the ability to question the representations of space as suggested by Löw. Therefore, there will be many lived spaces within the same place.

A summary of Lefebvre's spatial triad is provided by Zhang (2006: 221) who tries to apply it to an organisational scenario. He suggests:

On the one hand, we have an abstract space of pure mathematical figures and verbal messages – manifested in the design of offices, organisational rules and symbols, and so on ...; and, on the other, an all-too-material, and therefore *indifferent* space, consisting of the flows of labour, money, information ... and every physical movement of employees: their opening doors, sipping coffee, and etc. In between of these two poles, there is the lived space, a space of pure subjectivity, of human experiences ..., of people's sense-making, imagination, and feeling – that is, their local knowledge – of the organisational space as they encounter it. In so far that our experiences always take place in pre-fabricated physical spaces, and that what we think may not coincide with what we do, the lived space embodies both conceived and perceived spaces without being reducible to either.

The three dimensions are therefore very closely associated with each other. They may not be divorced from each other as Tuan (1979: 388, 389) does when he suggests that, according to a humanistic perspective, the study of space is about people's feelings, ideas and experiences. Tuan posits that "experience is the totality of means by which we come to know the world." Such experience includes feelings, conceptions and perceptions as core in understanding space. This perspective is interesting because Tuan seems to be suggesting exactly what Merrifield (1993) says was addressed by Lefebvre's social production of space. Tuan's suggestion that experience is the totality of what is needed to know the world appears to separate or isolate the lived space from the physical and the conceived space. His 'totality' in this statement seems to be still

incomplete if we were to compare it to Lefebvre's dialectical triad to the analysis of space.

On the other hand, in an explanation that encompasses the three dimensions of space, Zhang (2006: 22) compares them to the three cameras that are simultaneously projected onto an organisation.

*...through the first camera we read mathematical data, the height of the man, the length of a corridor, and so on; through the second we see the body movement of the man, his walking about, his gestures; and through the third, we reach into his inner subjectivity, his feeling about the stupid doorknob which wouldn't turn, for instance.*

Zhang maintains that each of the three cameras generates different data but they all simultaneously refer to the organisational space on which they project. They overlap instead of juxtapose each other. He suggests that a researcher needs to try to constantly "hop" from one camera to the other to get a nuanced understanding of space of an organisation.

For argument's sake and in the context of this study, such an organisation is a HEI and the man is an academic who works in the institution. To understand how space affects this academic, one may need a look beyond only the physical space, the position of the academic or just his/her productivity. These aspects should be considered together with the experiences of the academic and not in isolation from one another.

Another example of how the spatial triad works in an organisational context can be seen in the following scenario as sketched by Tissen and Deprez (2008: 30):

*A group of friends that decide to launch a business together are obliged to establish social spaces for trust, mental spaces for what is important to prioritize and physical spaces for production; spaces that cannot but evolve and interact as time goes by....*

It is therefore not only physical space that matters. However, it is worth noting that as a Marxist, Lefebvre is concerned more about how space is produced in the three dimensions discussed above. In this study I not only examined the process of the production of space by academics, but also how the space that is produced by the Institution affects the practices of academic identity construction. That is why my analysis in this study also considered issues of power, which, as is clear from the preceding, are inherent in the conceived space.

Monnet (2011) also notes a relationship between space, power and identity. This relationship according to him is mediated by symbols that can be contextually interpreted. He defines a symbol as a material substance such as a building that “communicates something intangible (an idea, a value, a feeling)....” (Monnet 2011: 1). When a physical space symbolises something it becomes a Thirdspace, a lived space to the individual who interprets it as such (Merrifield 1993; Lefebvre 1991). Referring to this subjectivity, Amedeo, Golledge and Stimson (2009: 6) argue:

*...in the human world – particularly with regard to meanings associated with apprehending, experiencing, and functioning in it – space takes a great number of forms. In other words, it is not space as such that matters to individuals, but rather the form that it takes in activity – and experiential – related circumstances. These forms and their meanings are nearly always dependent on the meanings of other things, contexts, and processes in which space plays a role.*

The form that space takes in activity is the produced space as argued by spatial theorists above. The other things that the form and meaning of space may take may be what and how an individual academic defines himself/herself as an academic. It is therefore important that space is analysed beyond the physical to include the other dimensions as well. Arguing for the significance of recognising the symbolic subjective meaning of places, Monnet (2011: 2) gives an example of a factory which can symbolise progress, production, employment, exploitation and/or pollution simultaneously. He suggests that places should be viewed as more than the material objects but as carrying a symbolic dimension.

In the case of this example, what a factory symbolises to individuals and groups is the representational space that combines both the conceived and the perceived space. Such symbolic place, according to Monnet (2011: 2) means different things to people nearby compared to what it means to those at a distance. It means different things to those inside from those outside it, to small groups or to large communities. This argument is in line with Soja and Lefebvre's thinking about the lived space, namely that it is personally experienced. It also implies that even those who conceive space may not assign similar meanings to it as those of individuals who experience it on a daily basis. It is therefore imperative not to take space for granted, but to interrogate the meaning it bears for individuals and/or groups in a particular context.

Space as designated by Monnet was part of my interest in this study because as academics produce space (if they do) or utilise/consume the produced space (so get produced by it), they experience it "through its associated images and symbols and images" (Lefebvre 1991: 39). I assumed that different academics would have unique perspectives of what space meant or symbolised for each one of them. In other words in the study I was interested in analysing the sociospatial practices and the symbolic meanings that individuals attach to their spaces (Lumsden 2004) and how this affects their academic identity construction.

This discussion again points to the fact that the three dimensions of space are interrelated. The three moments of space cannot easily be separated or contemplated in isolation. It can be concluded that space is physical/perceived, but that it is conceived abstractly through policies, plans and designs. Space is always lived (experienced), but sometimes not by those who were responsible for its conceptualisation. In the context of this particular study, the lived space refers to academics' experiences, perceptions, meanings or symbols they attach to the spatial policies and the physical space they use for academic practices. Thus, the focus in this study was on UNISA space in its 'totality' in the CEDU. I looked at how it is conceived (i.e., how policy makers contemplate the creation and organisation of space); how it is perceived (i.e., how it is arranged and used); and how it is experienced (i.e., how, according to individual academics, it enables and/or constrains practices of academic identity construction). Like Molotch (1993: 888) I assumed space as "neither merely a medium nor a list of ingredients, but an

interlinkage of geographic form, built environment, symbolic meanings, and routines of life.”

For this study, Lefebvre’s spatial triad and Soja’s Thirdspace provided a lens for analysing the enabling and constraining effects of space on academic identity formation at each level of space as experienced by participants and as presented in policy. These effects were analysed at the spatial practices of academic identity construction in the CEDU; as the representations of space in policy; and as the everyday experiences of the university space by those who undergo spatial practices. I extended the third dimension discussed above to include another aspect of academic experiences which also forms part of their space. I referred to this extension as the metaphorical space, discussed in the next section.

#### **2.2.4 METAPHORICAL SPACE**

“Space may be physical and geographical, but ‘space’ is also a metaphor for people’s range of intention and understanding – things seen, but also things thought” (Cairns, McInnes & Roberts 2003: 129)

Social space and mental space in Lefebvre’s theory are metaphorical in the sense that they are not the ‘real’ spaces that may be mapped or mathematically measured. In everyday language people use the concept of space and place to refer not only to the physical or any of the dimensions discussed above. For example, people are ‘placed’ in hierarchical ‘positions’ in their work ‘places’ (see also Shome 2003). In this sentence alone there is a combination of metaphorical and ‘real’ spaces to which reference is made.

In her article, “*Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness*”, bell hooks (1990) (the name is idiosyncratically lower capped by the author) speaks of the marginal space, a real physical place where African-Americans were oppressed by those in ‘the centre’ during the period of colonialism. Her reference to space then becomes metaphorical when she states that she chooses to remain in that space even though she is already outside it, through having been educated by the oppressor. The example she uses is that her work is written in the language of the oppressor which has enabled her to

progress in life. Therefore, one may, even though struggling against oppression, not want to do away with such a language. In that sense one would be in the marginal space with regard to that language. This is what hooks labels as marginal space – wanting change yet not wanting change.

Hook's views are, of course, political as she refers to colonialism, its practices and the resistance to it. In fact she also acknowledges that the words she uses, such as "marginality, resistance, struggle" are no longer popular. She deliberately uses them to put herself in the margin. But this is a useful view that may apply to academics constructing their identities at a university. This kind of space may also include issues of decision making. Decision making may depend on where an academic feels located (margin or centre) within a university space. Some may feel that decisions about how things should happen should be done by those at the centre and those in the margin should comply and act as expected. On the other hand, some may feel empowered by being in the margin. More provoking thoughts from hooks about this marginality are that margins can be both sites of repression and sites of resistance. This echoes the point that the position that one feels one is located in can be enabling or constraining in relation to academic practices and identity development in HE. In other words, the feeling about centrality and/or marginality may impact on the academics understanding of their identities within the university.

Walker (1999: 35) concurs with hooks that the term marginal has a strong negative connotation, symbolising oppression and domination "by the master discourse of society." But it is not always that marginal space is repressive. It depends on what that margin is. If the margin is the case of not holding certain positions, it may give more time for an individual to perform the required practices towards achieving certain goals. Time in this case becomes a metaphorical space as well - space to think, to reflect, to act or perform as required or as needed.

Barnett and Di Napoli (2008:6) also mention voice as one of the aspects of space needed by academics in HE. Voice is a space for academics to air their opinions, their thoughts and ethical concerns within the institutions. Barnett and Di Napoli argue that having a voice means one is empowered "to express oneself within a complex power space in which certain views – if only unwittingly – may be marginalised and rendered



semi-detached from ‘the real world’” (Barnett & Di Napoli *ibid*). The question therefore is whether academics have this kind of space and, if they do, how they experience it.

Hooks (1990: 209) concludes her work by saying:

*I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as sites of resistance – as location of radical openness and possibility.*

She positions herself as such, even though, as she states, she is no longer in the other side of town where oppression was eminent. This view brings us to the issue of power which, as discussed below, can take different forms and, possibly, be held by all people to be able to make decisions of where they should be located: margin or centre. In the context of this study, as academics work towards constructing their identities within university space, how they experience issues of power may be similar or different. In the next section the way in which power is viewed by some theorists in relation to its influence on people is outlined.

## **2.3 POWER AND SPACE**

*Thinking about and organising space is one of the pre-occupations of power* (Jean-Michel [1977], translated by Moore 2008).

Power is a prevalent concept in social sciences research. The analysis of power in such research started off with the focus on macro social structures such as government/state, church, and so on (Gergen 1995). Later on the analysis started bringing in the concept of individual power. Research on place and space has also not been exempted from attention to power. For example, the statement by Jean-Michel above is similar to what Frisvoll (2012: 449) argues is the recent trend in social sciences research on power. Frisvoll asserts that such research shows an understanding of power as “the constitutor of reality”. In other words, Frisvoll understands all reality as influenced by power. The same is also suggested by Monnet (2011) (see section 2.2 above) where he argues that spatial practices involve power relations. Since spatial practices are part of people’s

everyday reality, they are also constituted by power. Ekinsmyth (2013: 525) is of the same opinion that “...space and place are imbued with ideology, power and rules for social interaction.”

These views about space and power may be seen as being in line with what Lefebvre (1996) argues in his theory, namely that power and ideology are inherent in the design of space. However, due to his intention of revealing politics in space and his philosophical stance as a Marxist, Lefebvre focusses mainly on a macro social analysis of class and state power. But, as with the concept of space, (see section 2.2 above), power is a complex concept of which the meaning depends on the philosophical position of the proponent.

As with space there is initially a binary of opinions about power where it is viewed as being either power of domination or power of resistance (Frisvoll 2012: 449). The sovereign, controlling, oppressive and dominating power is referred to as power-over (Wartenberg 1990; Frisvoll 2012). According to Karlberg (2005) and Lukes (1974) the dominating power has the potential to force people to do things which they would otherwise not do. It prevents people from identifying, recognizing and/or advancing their own self-identified interests. It can be regarded as a constraining power. But in terms of how it operates in space Frisvoll (2012: 449) regards this form of power as “enabling institutions or individuals to ‘control’ certain spaces and coerce people into following particular rules.” In other words, the label “dominating” depends on the lens that one uses to look at the realising or effecting of this mode of power. For some it is constraining, but for others enabling in a way similar to hooks’s marginal spaces as discussed in section 2.2.4 above.

Dominating power may be implicit as illustrated by Lukes 1974 (in Karlberg 2005: 3), stating:

*A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants. Indeed, is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have*

*the desires you want them to have – that is, secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires?*

This example may be interpreted as meaning that in a particular context academics may be made to think that the spatial policies and spatial arrangements are to their advantage – to desire space the way policies want them to desire it. This form of power is described by Foucault (1977) as false consciousness, a situation where people are made to believe that they are free while they do not recognize the imposition of power over them. Cairns et al. (2003:128) give the following example. In most institutions and organisations, work attendance is regulated as hourly, daily and weekly periods during which every activity is monitored through institutional rules. This way, individuals are trained and conditioned to accept the “chronological, coordinated clock time as a necessary part of social life and a major element of organisation.” This clock time may be regarded as one of the “hidden techniques of discipline” mentioned by Foucault where he contends:

*...contemporary society is not maintained by a visible state apparatus of national guards and state police, less still by shared value systems, but by the hidden techniques of discipline always at work in ‘carceral’ institutions” (Foucault 1977, cited in Burrell, 1988: 225).*

On the other hand, in relation to the controlling power Foucault (1985: 337) argues:

*For let us not deceive ourselves: if we speak of the power of laws, institutions and ideologies, if we speak of structures or mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others. The term “power” designates relationships between “partners” (and by that I am not thinking of a game with fixed rules, but simply, and for the moment staying in the most general terms, of an ensemble of actions that induce others and follow from one another).*

Therefore, power is not as simple as mere power over others. It is not necessarily as linear as that.

The second form of power is what Wartenberg (1990) refers to as power-to. This is power that individuals have and use to resist dominance (Frisvoll 2012) or to exercise choices. According to Karlberg (2005), most power theorists oppose the focus on the power-to because it shifts the legitimate focus on the social inequalities that exist in modern societies.

While not refuting the existence of these two binary forms of power, Foucault (1985: 331) criticised the Marxist state and dominance power. However, instead of literally supporting the resistance power, he brought up what may be regarded as, in the case of this discussion, a third mode of power. His argument was that any analysis of power should not start from the topmost or the state as suggested by the Marxists. Instead it should start from below because power is dispersed. Power is “entangled” with knowledge and therefore it is situated at different levels of society (see Cilliers 2013; Frisvoll 2012). Jessop (2007: 36) gives a summary of Foucault’s argument about analysing power as he argues:

*The study of power should begin from below, in the heterogeneous and dispersed micro-physics of power, explore specific forms of its exercise in different institutional sites, and consider how, if at all, these were linked to produce broader and more persistent societal configurations. One should study power where it is exercised over individuals rather than legitimated at the centre; explore the actual practices of subjugation rather than the intentions that guide attempts at domination; and recognize that power circulates through networks rather than being applied at particular points.*

Following this view that power is not centralised, Foucault (1982: 781) argues that power that “applies in everyday life...makes individuals subjects.” Subject in this case has two meanings: “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge.” What this statement means is that the dispersion of power is not only by individuals to others but individuals are also affected by their own power, which relates to what Foucault (1993: 222) refers to as “a politics of ourselves”.

Politics of ourselves is described by Foucault as a need to relate to ourselves and actively constitutes ourselves as “ethical agents”. As such, Foucault (1985:331) acknowledges that in life there is always a “struggle” against power. However, such struggle is not only from the ruling class or state to individuals or groups. Instead, he identifies three categories of struggle:

*Against forms of domination (ethnic, social and religious); against forms of exploitation that separate individuals from what they produce; or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggle against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission).*

According to Foucault, these forms of struggle may be found either isolated or mixed together, with one predominating others. If this is the case, then it can be argued that Jean-Michel’s (1977) statement in the beginning of this section may not be seen as referring to dominating or exploiting power in space. Individuals’ power may also be pre-occupied with organising space for self and/or for others.

Foucault also refers to this relational power as governmentality, contending that power is about the “conduct of conducts” (Foucault 1977: 1991). Conduct of conducts, according to Foucault, is about the manner in which human beings manage themselves, how they are managed by others and how they manage others. Governmentality, according to Rose (1999), takes place through certain technologies of power, that is, the thoughts, ideas, strategies, tactics and knowledges that influence conduct to produce some desired effects and to avert some undesired ones. Such governmentality can, thus, not be regarded as a one-way situation. For example, Gane (2012: 612) notes that while the panopticon, one model of governmentality, is seen as a way in which the states monitor or watch over the national markets, in the neoliberal environment the markets also structure the state in relation to its form and activities. Similarly, Bevir (1999: 66) states that “individuals police themselves by examining, confessing, and regulating their own thoughts and behavior in accord with a certain concept of normality.” In other words, individuals uphold their behaviours and practices to be within the acceptable confines and expectations of a particular context and that of themselves.

In relation to this conduct, Bevir (1999: 66) notes that sometimes Foucault may be viewed as placing more emphasis on self-conduct, what constitutes subjectivity. However, it is clear in his writing that he acknowledges society, where such self/subject functions, is a regime of power which “defines the subject, conceived in terms of norms by which we try to live and the techniques by which we try to ensure we do so...society gives us the values and practices by which we live.” In other words, society has elements of being deterministic of the person’s functions. For example, the governmentality technologies may include policies and other means of managing people within a particular society. Bevir (1999: 67) further argues that “even when individuals appear to live in accord with commitments they have accepted for themselves, they really are only examining and regulating their lives in accord with a regime of power.” This argument relates to what Foucault (1977) refers to as subjectification. Referring to Foucault (1977), Green (2010) argues that such subjectification occurs through disciplinary coercion rather than physical coercion. This way “individual ‘bodies’ – from thought to the corpus – are meticulously produced in a variety of ‘projects of docility’ ” (Green 2010: 319). Before this happens, Green argues, a modern way of understanding the ‘self’ is cultivated within individuals. They adopt the ‘bodies’ and identities which they regard as appropriate for their social classification as they know themselves. As such, they “become agents of their own construction and regulation – that is, their own subjectification” (Green 2010: 319).

While governmentality may sound oppressive in some instances, Foucault (1977:194; also Collier 2009) cautions against the notion of seeing it as such. He argues:

*We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.*

Therefore, for Foucault power is everywhere and it circulates throughout social relations with both favourable and unfavourable effects.

How then does Foucault's dispersed relational power relate to the issue of social relations in space as viewed by Lefebvre? As indicated by the arguments of spatial theorists discussed previously, power is pre-occupied with spatial organisation. Foucault on the other hand agrees that space is ever part of "the battle for control and surveillance of individuals, but it is a battle and not a question of domination" (Elden & Crampton 2008: 2). This implies that space can be used to control people, but people have their own power within that space. In an interview, Paul Rabinow asked Foucault if he saw any architectural (a spatial form) projects as "forces of liberation or resistance" (During 1999: 134). His response was:

*I do not think that there is anything that is functionally – by its very nature – absolutely liberating. Liberty is a practice. So there may, in fact, always be a certain number of projects whose aim is to modify some constraints, to loosen, or even to break them, but none of these projects can, simply by its nature, assure that people will have liberty automatically, that it will be established by the project itself. The liberty of men is never assured by the institutions and laws that are intended to guarantee them. This is why almost all of these laws and institutions are quite capable of being turned around. Not because they are ambiguous, but simply because 'liberty' is what must be exercised.*

This response indicates Foucault's notion of dispersed power regardless of the existence of spatial policies. Cairns et al. (2003:130) are of a similar opinion that "...organisational actors may find both freedom and control within the spatial constraints within which they operate." However, Foucault (1972) argues that those in power have tended to legitimise their own versions of space for the purposes of institutional and disciplinary knowledge control. Foucault's response actually illustrates that people have power to decide whether space is experienced as constraining or enabling in their practices. But the question is whether individuals do indeed regard themselves as possessing that power. It is imperative therefore to understand how people experience power, whether as liberating or dominating, whilst they construct their identities in a university space. But the manner in which academic identities are constructed is also a matter for debate. As such in the section below, the theories that relate to such identity construction are presented.

## **2.4 ACADEMIC IDENTITIES**

Like space and power, the concepts that have been discussed above, “academic identities” is also a concept of interest in social sciences research. In this section I first discuss the theories of identity in order to locate the concept of academic identities in context. This is followed by the discussion of the different perspectives of what constitutes academic identities and relate those perspectives to the impact of the HE changes discussed in Chapter 1. As indicated ‘academics’ in this study is a concept that includes those members of university staff who are involved in teaching, research and related academic practices, regardless of their post levels (such as whether they are junior lecturers, lecturers, senior lecturers, associate professors or professors and also regardless of their administrative position such as whether they act as a COD or a Programme Manager). The identities of interest in this study are therefore those of academics. It is, thus, important to also put the concept of identity into perspective before exploring the issue of academic identity formation.

### **2.4.1 Identity theories in Social Sciences**

Two main identity theories identified by Stets and Burke (2000) are social identity theory and identity theory. In the social identity theory, individuals are seen as involved in the processes of self-categorisation and social comparison by identifying “in-groups” and “out-groups” in society. “In-groups” are those groups of people that an individual regards as having similar values, beliefs, attitudes, affective reactions, behavioural norms styles of speech and other social attributes to his or hers (Stets & Burke 2000: 225). An individual then categorises himself/herself as belonging to this group. This social categorisation defines the individual’s identity within a group’s socially defined terms. “Out-groups” on the other hand are those groups that have no similar characteristics to the individual. This form of categorisation, according to Deaux and Burke (2010) reflects the psychologist’s view of identity.

Similarly, in identity theory an individual is in a process of self-categorisation but such categorisation is based on roles and positions in society rather than on groups as is the case with social identity theory. Stets and Burke (2000: 225) regard this categorisation



of the self in relation to occupation of a role as the core of identity in this theory. The expectations and meanings associated with that role, and which guide behaviour in that role, are incorporated into the self. This is how sociologists view identity (Deaux and Burke 2010).

Differentiating between social identity and role identity Stets and Burke (2000: 226) state:

*Having a particular social identity means being at one with a certain group, being like others in the group, and seeing things from the group's perspective. In contrast, having a particular role identity means acting to fulfil the expectation of the role, coordinating interaction with role partners, and manipulating the environment to control the resources for which the role has responsibility.*

In trying to locate academic identities within one of these theories seems difficult because they equally match what, in the case of this study, academic identities are about. It would be easier to say role basis of identity is more relevant for academic identities, but academics are defined within the group of a university where there are other groups who are not academics. Stets and Burke (2000: 228) make a similar example about differentiating between a teacher and a student in a school. Such categorisation involves, simultaneously, both group identity basis and role identity basis. Deaux and Burke (2010: 4) refer to this situation as a “multiplicity of identity”. Academics have common aspects that characterise them as academics against aspects that characterise students and administrators for example (even though academics also find themselves doing administrative work at times). At the same time they have roles specific to them, such as postgraduate supervision and research. In this case, Stets and Burke argue that it is not easy to analytically or empirically separate group from role identities. That is why in this study the concept used is academic identities, and not academic identity. Academics are regarded as having multiple identities rather than one identity. Deaux and Burke (2010) trace the notion of multiple identities back to its founders William James (1890) (1842-1910) and George Herbert Mead (1934) (1863-

1931). They argue that all contemporary identity theories assume such inevitable multiplicity.

In the next section the discussion focusses on perspectives of what constitutes an academic. The discussion will also support the point made here that there are academic identities rather than an individual or single academic identity.

#### 2.4.2 Perspectives on academic identities

Barnet and Di Napoli (2008:7) argue that there are multiple interpretations of the concept of “academic identities”. They argue that different groups within HE, professional managers, academic developers, students, academics, all regard the concept as having different interpretations. Nevertheless, there are authors who have specific understandings of what constitutes academic identity. Stensaker, Henkel, Välimaa and Sarrico (2012: 7) regard “academic identities” as a postmodern phenomenon that has to do with change resulting from a process of constant dialogue with “significant others”. Significant others “can be disciplinary-based communities (national and international colleagues), professional communities (colleagues and/or professional organisations in one’s own institution and/or at the national level), institutional-level communities (colleagues from other departments), institutional traditions (like organisational sagas or institutional memories) and national culture (as a reference group: friends, relatives).” Stensaker et al. (ibid) mention specific questions that lead to an understanding of one’s identity, whether academic or not. These questions are: who I am and where I belong. This understanding of academic identities can be associated with the “group” based social identity theory.

However, relation to group is not the only way academic identities are understood. The changes in HE, as discussed in Chapter 1, challenge the way academics previously understood themselves in HE. Specific to the UK universities, Barnett and Di Napoli (2008) mention that the end of the binary division between research institutions and teaching institutions led to the growth of the audit and quality assurance systems which, in turn, led to, among others, the end of the conceptual set of understandings of what HE was about. Such changes brought questions to the established academic identities and senses of self (Barnet & Di Napoli 2008:7). These authors argue that academics who had traditionally sensed their identity as framed by the notion of academic freedom had to rethink their roles in the fractured HE system. They mention phenomena such as massification, accountability and marketization as having had a significant impact on the “dislocations of identity”. Even the “significant others” mentioned by Stensaker et al. sometimes change due to the (demographic) changes in HE. For example, institutional mergers that took place in South Africa may have affected many academics who find themselves with different significant others than the ones they were used to. As such,

Henkel et al. (2012) suggest that academic identities can have multiple starting points. Those starting points may be either supporting or resisting changes in HE or simultaneously doing both. This view is in line with Taylor's (2008) perspective that "identity work is on-going work. It is work that is constituted by history and by the conditions within which we live and work, including the conflicts and tensions within specific workplaces." Similarly, Barnett and Di Napoli (2008: 7) also speak of "identity deconstruction and construction" which happens together with changes in HE. Clearly, these views may not place academic identities in one and not the other of the identity theories discussed in the beginning of this section.

Taylor (2008: 34) refers to the time when there was academic freedom, collegiality and professional autonomy in HE as the "golden age". He also perceives this age as no longer existing due to changes that have taken place in HE and that academics' sense of purpose has been affected (see also McInnis 2010). McInnis (2010: 153) states that sometimes academics increasingly encounter situations where even the choices about teaching and research are threatened by some "mission-driven initiatives." The situations raised by these authors indicate the influence of different forces on the metaphorical space of academics towards building their academic identities due to the changes in HE.

Notwithstanding the changes in HE, an aspect that plays a significant role in the construction of academic identities is the complex and contested ways of knowing and approaches to knowledge generation (Adam 2012: 71). Much teaching and research according to Adam (ibid) involves the construction and application of such ways and approaches. Stensaker et al. (2012: 7) refer to these as the "intellectual traditions" or "epistemic traditions". They state that such traditions influence the way academics see the world, the way they define relationships between people, as well as their values in life. They affect the way academics organise their work (teaching and research), the way they communicate with other academics through publications and in face-to-face interactions, and the principles they set themselves in relation to matters such as academic leadership. Adam (2012: 71) is of the same opinion that both academics and the institutions where they work have epistemic identities. He refers to these as the "dispositional beliefs about knowledge and the nature of knowledge that are socially and psychologically constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed." These are also not

static but keep changing “to reflect new hegemonies in the conceptualisation and valuing of knowledge and knowing” (Adam *ibid*). How academics are affected by such traditions and changes at a particular institution is a matter of interest in this study.

Barnet and Di Napoli (2008:7) bring a different and interesting perspective about space for academic identity construction in relation to the changes in HE. They argue that such changes led to the emergence of spaces for academic identity from “actors” who had not been recognised as such before, such as administrators, librarians and students. These groups were given space to work with academics to contribute in redefining the nature, aims and scope of HE and they have been trying to define themselves, their role, their domains and boundaries in relation to the others. This is seen by Barnet and Di Napoli as a space that has paradoxically been opened by the changes in HE policy framework.

Another perspective of academic identities is presented by Smith and Nyamapfene (2010) in a study conducted in South Africa in which they asked academics what it meant to be “an academic”. Participants in general noted that being an academic, that is, having an academic identity, implied certain roles, participation in specific activities and having certain attitudes. Roles that participants mentioned included being a teacher; researcher; administrator; mentor and consultant. Activities included community outreach or service, development of teaching materials, student supervision, knowledge sharing and participation in the activities of professional bodies. Attitudes on the other hand included taking risks, having an enquiring mind, and representing the conscience of society.

Similarly, Hyde, Clarke and Drennan (2013: 7) understand academic identities as being developed through teaching and research. They also mention discipline or departmental cultures as a source of faculty members’ identities, but they highlight that there may be common values across institutional and disciplinary boundaries. Amongst the values they mention are academic freedom, the community of scholars, scrutiny of accepted wisdom, truth seeking, collegial governance, individual autonomy, and service to society through the production of knowledge, the transmission of culture, and the education of the youth. Strathern (2008: 10) is of the same opinion that people’s identities are partly shaped by the kind of knowledge practices that are engendered in their disciplines, both

in terms of “shared bodies of knowledge” and “in the manner in which material is collected, evidence appraised, work criticised and results validated.”

For all the roles, activities, values and attitudes mentioned above, it also seems that space and the context of that space and place play a crucial role for academics to function and create their identities. Context of place is also referred to as place-identity. Place-identity is a set of meanings associated with a particular cultural landscape, from which individuals and groups draw as they construct their personal and social identities (Butina-Watson & Bentley 2007: 6). On the same note, Strathern (2008: 10) refers to organisational identity, perceptions and beliefs that are collectively held about the distinctiveness of a particular organisation. He argues that organisational symbols, myths, and language have power to stimulate fresh ideas, change attitudes, and provide the organisational members with new cognitive frames of action. In relation to that, Delanty (2008: 125) brings another view that institutional contexts shape academic identities and that academic identities also shape institutional contexts. This happens because of the simultaneous existence of academics’ agency (or power of choice) and the institutional organisation of roles and rules from which academics draw as they perform their day-to-day practices. This is an example of how power is not concentrated at one point, but is dispersed to different levels of society (Foucault 1985). It is not a unilateral issue.

Billot and Smith (2008: 9) are of the same opinion that the institutional context influences the course of an academic identity, but individuals also have an ability to negotiate their roles and responsibilities by deciding on their priorities. Also, McAlpine, Jazvac-Martek and Gonsalves (2008: 120) clearly highlight the independence of academics regardless of the “polycontextuality” of their working environments. They state that lecturers engage in multiple roles such as being a lecturer in different courses, reviewing peers’ work for journals, supervising postgraduate students or being consultants on certain projects. The same lecturers may be members of academic committees, societies and/or research teams. The purposes and role expectations of each of these may vary according to how much they are congruent with a lecturer’s identity goals and whether they are mandated by the institution or a choice of a lecturer. Lecturers then tend to invest more in the roles they highly value towards their identity development. What remains to be explored then, in relation to this statement, is the manner in which those

lecturers find space enabling or not in their endeavour to develop their identities through their selected practices.

If, therefore, it is the case that place-identity or organisational identity affects people's thoughts, attitudes, choices and actions towards the construction of their personal and social identities, it might be expected that the ODL identity of UNISA has enabling or constraining effects on academics developing their academic identities in this context. The intention of this study was to understand this argument and its implications.

There are also conditions that participants in Smith and Nyamapfene's (2010: 116) study mentioned as having a possible effect on academic identity construction. These conditions included: the discipline taught; the level at which teaching was taking place; institutional factors, including the historical background of an institution; the institution's teaching and learning culture; and facilities to support teaching and research, its location, and its ethos. In other words, these authors also regard space as significant in the construction of academic identities – the institution's location and ethos, facilities, and culture. It is also possible that the ranking of the institution internationally could affect one's academic identity. For example there are institutions that are ranked top and which are known as prestigious and elite. Academics in variously ranked universities may possibly view their identities differently.

In relation to the changes in HE as discussed in the sections above, Winter (2009: 122) argues that the processes of academic identity construction may be faced with contradicting academic and managerial demands. The academic demands are the traditional values that some academics may seek to pursue as against the demands of the corporate enterprise. This tension relates to the modes of power and/or governmentality that were discussed in section 2.3. Individual academics may conduct themselves in such a way that they work according to the stipulations of the conceived space, or they may draw from their power to act in ways that work better for them and their unique academic identities.

Some authors position academic disciplines as being more influential in determining academic identities than the individual institutions (Becher & Trowler 2001; Henkel 2010; Ross, Sinclair, Knox, Bayne & Macleod 2014; Silver 2003). Silver (2003: 3) for

example warns against regarding an institution as a unitary cultural entity. His argument is that in any institution individuals and groups may keenly share symbols and myths which are not those that a particular institution itself treasures. Referring to Barnett (1990), Silver maintains that it is not obvious that members of different disciplines consider themselves to be part of the same institutional community except for the fact that they have the same employer. It may happen that individuals have more “affinity” with members of the same discipline as theirs in other institutions. This suggestion by Silver, however, may also still raise a question of whether those academics who would like to make closer relationships with colleagues of the same disciplines in other institutions do have space to do that.

Henkel (2010) also identifies the discipline as a particular kind of community which has always been regarded as a primary source of academic identities. In this regard, Becher (1989) refers to academic tribes in the disciplines, with particular cultures and epistemological traditions. It can be asked, however, what happens when academics belonging to the same discipline do not work in the same place – that is, if some work from home or some work on different campuses of the same institution. The question is how such an arrangement affects or does not affect the construction of identities in relation to the discipline as suggested by Henkel. Henkel also posits that HE transformation has blurred, loosened, broken down and collapsed the boundaries and distinctions between disciplines and groups. Staff in HE move between different levels and dimensions of physical and/or virtual spaces across the world. They sometimes construct their own networks and new markets while such spaces are sometimes created by new funding mechanisms or policies (Henkel 2010: 8-9). Henkel’s argument here supports the idea of the development of a Thirdspace (as suggested in section 2.3 above) that academics may choose not to be confined by the institutional space, neither physically nor abstractly, but work in collaboration with other academics in the other institutions or other disciplines in constructing their identities.



## **2.5 CLOSING COMMENTS**

In this chapter space as a concept was explored together with place in order to locate the conceptual framework for this study, particularly in relation to space. Hereafter the postmodern perspective of space was traced back to its origin in which the Descartes perspective of absolute, measurable space was critiqued. Lefebvre's perspectives of space as well as those of the postmodern spatial theorists were explored. In these discussions of space it became clear that space and power are mutually inclusive. As such, the section that followed included a discussion of power theories and the identification of Foucault's perspective of power and space as that which would be used as a lens to examine spatio-power issues in the context where this study took place. The purpose of the discussions of space and power was to examine the influence of these constructs in academic identity construction in a HE context. Consequently it was also necessary to examine various authors' views on the nature and scope of academic identity formation and development. This discussion was preceded by the presentation of two major theories on identity, social identity theory and identity theory. These theories seem to have different perspectives of what identity formation is based on. The discussion on academic identities, however, revealed that it would be difficult to locate this form of identities in one and not the other theory.

The next chapter extends the discussion on space, power and academic identity construction, with special attention to HE perspectives.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH ON SPACE AND HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTICES**

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#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In chapter 2 the theories from which the conceptual framework of this study was drawn were discussed in relation to their relevance to this study. The discussion presented a perspective of space in which Lefebvre (1991), Soja (1996) and others regard space as a social construct which is composed of the physical, the abstract and the lived dimensions. In this chapter I reviewed literature related to this multidimensionality of space in relation to academic practices and academic identity construction in HE. It should be stated foremost that the ideal way of discussing the relationship between the dimensions of space and academic identity development in HE would be to deal with each dimension separately. However, due to the overlapping nature of these dimensions, it became evident that, as suggested by Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1996), they cannot be separated and discussed individually. Thus, although an effort was made to focus attention on each one of the dimensions individually in different sections of this chapter, the discussion in each section tends to have overlapping arguments that touch on all dimensions. The chapter is composed of the following sections:

- The physical space and its significance for academic practice where I introduce the section by indicating the dearth of research on physical space in HE. Necessity and significance of such research is also highlighted, followed by a discussion of literature from other fields about physical space and practice. A discussion of the challenges that pertain to physical space in HE is also part of this section.
- Perspectives of conceived space and practice where I looked at how the designed organisational and/or institutional policies regulate or affect practice.
- Perceived and metaphorical space where I reviewed literature on how different dimensions of space are experienced in practice. Particular emphasis in this section is on the metaphorical aspect of the lived space (time, choices and academic freedom) to avoid repetition of the aspects that featured in the discussions of the physical and the conceived space.

- ODL University space as a research focus. This section indicates the manner in which institutional contexts, together with academics' choices, enable or constrain academic identity development in ODL institutions.
- Personality traits and academic identity construction. In this section I reviewed literature in relation to different personality traits and dispositions and their perceived effect on practice.

### **3.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PHYSICAL SPACE IN ACADEMIC IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION**

Spatial theories discussed in chapter 2 indicate that space is not neutral. It is capable of producing spatial orientations that shape people's practice (Westberry, McNaughton, Billot & Gaeta 2013: 503). In other words, space has the capacity to enable or constrain faculty work. This understanding refers to all dimensions of space, including the physical dimension. However, as mentioned in chapter 2, there seems to be insufficient literature on physical space in academe despite the importance it has on HE practices. A few reasons relating to the importance of physical space are mentioned in this section as an orientation to why a discussion of physical spaces in HE is regarded as significant in this particular study.

First, some of the HE changes discussed in chapter 1 have resulted in or implied the need for changes in the physical workspace where academic practices take place. Second, in addition to the changes that have taken place (or are taking place) in HE, some, if not all, institutions effect changes in their physical spaces from time to time. These changes should concern more than the aesthetical appeal to users or other people, but the designs or plans and redevelopments of the physical space should acknowledge the spatial needs of all in the institution (Jamieson, Gilding, Taylor & Trevitt 200: 221). Both these situations necessitate research on physical space because, as Davis, Leach and Clegg (2011: 194) suggest, changes in the physical layout or configuration of the physical space can significantly affect individual and/or team work in an organization (cf. Laing, Duffy, Jaunzens & Willis 1998). Without research in this area, the manner in which people are affected by the physical space, changed or not, will be undetermined. In fact, the manner in which people and the physical space interact will not be known. This interaction is realized by Alexander and Price (2012) who posit

that the work environment is as equally affected by what people do in it as by how it affects them. In other words, while space affects people's actions, it is also affected by what people do in and with it.

This shortage of literature on physical space in HEIs is due to the fact that the physical resources of HEIs are not a popular research topic (Ibrahim, Yusoff & Bilal 2012; Kuntz 2012). Due to this limited interest in such research, Temple (2009: 209) notes that the contribution of a university's physical or built environment to its academic work is not properly understood (cf. Alexander & Price 2012; Kuntz, Petrovic & Ginocchio 2012; Westberry et al. 2013). He notes that mere assertions are made about such contributions and influence and that firm evidence in this regard is limited.

When the few researchers that do indeed show interest in this topic embark on this type of research, they tend to refer to literature in organisational management and other fields (e.g., Oyetunji 2013) and little on research related to HE contexts. This is because, contrary to the limited amount of literature on physical space in the HE milieu, Oyetunji (2013) notes an increase of attention to and interest in the concept of the physical work environment in organisational management contexts. He argues that the corporate world has begun to value the contribution that physical space makes to the level of employees' job performance (perhaps even more so than remuneration) and also their job satisfaction which in turn influences their performance. Favourable office layout and office comfort are believed to influence issues such as employees' innovation, motivation, initiative and productivity in the corporate environment. On the other hand, scarcely any such literature is available to explain the effect physical space has on academics' functioning in HE environments. In specific relation to the arguments put forward in this study, Kuntz (2012: 769) is also of the opinion that even in cases where research is done about faculty work, little of this research concerns the places or spaces where such work takes place.

The observations presented here are not unexpected because, as indicated in chapter 2, spatial theorists such as Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1996) note a tendency in which the general physical space is sometimes viewed as a container within which action takes place and not as a force that influences individuals (or what they do) situated in that space. The impression therefore may be that there is little need for research on physical

spaces. Current opinion, however, suggests the opposite and that more research is needed on this topic as it is increasingly being acknowledged that the physical space has a tangible impact on the people who work in it (see Alexander & Price 2012: 37; Edwards, Tracy & Jordan 2011: 221). Alexander and Price posit that the physical space affects individuals' creativity, the generation of ideas, communication, knowledge sharing, and problem solving in an organization.

In HE specifically, physical space that matters to academic practice includes more than just the physical buildings that house the academics. It encompasses the placement of those buildings within the broader university setting, whether they are at the center or at the periphery of the university's location and the size of the offices and the nature of the furnishing of those offices which in turn depend on the size and shape of the office space (Kuntz et al. 2012). These elements of the built environment do not impact the individual academic only, but also the social interaction amongst staff which is essential for individual academics' professional growth and development. The next section focusses particularly on the debates regarding office space in academe.

### **3.2.1 Perspectives on the office space in Higher Education**

It should be mentioned at this stage that the perspectives discussed in this section apply to contact universities. As will be detailed in section 3.5, there is limited research or literature regarding academics' offices and office space arrangement in ODL institutions. However, the assumption was that the perspectives about office space as presented in literature might shed some light on what to expect from the participants in an ODL context considering that they are also involved in similar academic roles as those of academics in contact institutions.

While academics are faced with the challenge of balancing research and teaching endeavors, these activities are also increasingly becoming collaborative, interactive and technology-enhanced (Ball, Dane & Yip 2012: 1). As a result, many HEIs are seen to be rethinking the designs of their physical spaces to address and accommodate these changes (see also Samson 2013; Sheahan 2014). This rethinking not only affects space as it pertains to the lecture halls but also in relation to academics' office space. Ball et al. (2012) suggest that many universities have begun to realize that the typical individual

academic office is no longer suitable for supporting the contemporary research and teaching objectives. The UK's *Times Higher Education* of 5 May 2006 reported that "academics' book-lined offices" were being "ripped down" to open up space for open plan offices. The move brought about debate in the areas concerned with regard to these two perspectives: individual offices versus open plan offices.

Some believe that academics need individual offices complete with a collection of reference works (Stern 2014) and the regular accoutrements of academe where they can consult one-on-one with their students and with small groups. The argument is that there are instances where there is a distinct need for confidential student-staff discourse and exchange of information. In certain instances research information needs to be exchanged and discussed, and this needs to be done in private. Such confidential relaying of information would be compromised if academics were to be accommodated in open plan offices. In addition, academics are "knowledge workers" (Oyetunji 2013: 28). Their work "uses mental faculty" which demands uninterrupted concentration, time to think, to analyse, to reflect and to interact for the generation and the evaluation of ideas (see also Le Roux 2008; Madikizela-Madiya 2014; Sheahan 2014). This view is also supported by Bhattacharjee (2012) who views thinking as key, especially to researchers whose intellects need to be always fit for developing new knowledge (cf. Resz 2010). This opinion, according to Clancy (2010), implies that universities need to create spaces that encourage academics to think and reflect on their role and position within HE. Similarly, Lefebvre (1991: 26) also argues that space "serves as a tool of thought and action." Therefore it is necessary that space in which academics have to do the thinking be examined to determine how it affects thinking and reasoning and other academic activities that relate to academic identity construction.

Some academics, according to Pinder, Parkin, Austin, Duggan, Lansdale and Demian (2009), are of the opinion that the change to open plan offices challenges the very definition and integrity of academia. In addition to complaints about noise and well-being related issues, open plan offices are associated with loss of status (Oyetunji 2013: 28). Also, Reisz (2010) gives an example of one academic who equates a spacious and pleasingly presented office with privacy, peace and quiet, and book and document storage space as essential for scholarly productivity. In other words, open-plan offices

are detrimental not only to scholarship, but also to the professional identity of academics (Oyetunji *ibid*).

On the other hand, some people believe that academics do not need individual offices, but should preferably be spending most of their time in class with students. This stance is probably based on observations by researchers such as Samson (2013) who mentions that in general, academics spend only about 30 to 40 per cent of their time in their offices. The argument for open plan offices is that they are optimal for providing space for communication and teamwork and are cost effective (Samson 2013: 624; Oyetunji 2013). It could be suggested that a communal resource repository that could be available to all academics would be more practical and feasible. It is the opinion that those who argue about the need for individual office space for academics should consider two facts. First, some resources found in academics' offices have been there for years, and are seldom, if ever, used. Therefore academics do not really need space for resources in their offices. Second, technology is taking over the need for face-to-face communication with colleagues and students. What may be needed, in addition to open plan offices, are small and medium sized rooms to accommodate meetings and small group teaching that would have been done, under conventional circumstances, in traditional offices (Harrison & Cairns 2008).

As Ball et al. (2012) note, the move for open plan offices is contested by certain academics who are inclined to view office space as a reflection of academic status, where most senior academics occupy the biggest offices (see also Baldry & Barnes 2012; Harrison & Cairns 2008; Hills & Levy 2014). In other words, like in other organisations, holders of higher status in academe have been rewarded spatially with personal and bigger offices, larger desks, preferred location and better furniture (Hills & Levy 2014: 420). In some contexts, being assigned an office also signifies the importance and relevance of a particular professor in the university and the discipline concerned (Samson 2013; Oyetunji 2013). Nevertheless, these reasons, and others indicated above, which are regarded by academics as significant are disregarded in many universities in the UK and Australia. Open plan offices for academics seem to have been given preference in these countries. A similar situation is reported in Botswana (Oyetunji 2013). This preference of open plan offices is an indication of power as being inherent in the design of space. The opinion is that universities exercise power

to adopt the open plan design, thus prioritizing financial gains (by opting for cost effective offices) over academics' actual experiences of the use of the said physical space.

The changes in the office design, as indicated above, are another indication of the extent to which HE has adopted the corporate model of organization. Hills and Levy (2014: 417) trace the interest in open plan offices in the corporate world from as early as 1904 and, more recently, the 1960s where these offices were chosen to control costs on floor area and building services. Open plan office design has also been associated with better workflow and communications in the commercial or corporate sector. Nevertheless, even in the corporate sector there has been disagreement about the desirability of open plan offices. These designs have been preferred by clerical employee grades. Managerial grades reported a decline in effectual communication in open plan offices and this was ascribed to the limited privacy characteristic of open plan offices (Baldry & Barnes 2012). This difference of opinion, according to Baldry and Barnes (2012: 234), was an indication that office designs are never a "one-size-fits-all" solution. It also shows that the effect of the proposed type of physical environment is known to those who experience it more than to those who conceive of such spaces. In fact, Pinder et al. (2009) speaking of university office space note that the drivers of the conversations about change in the design of office spaces have been the suppliers of space (estate professionals and architects) and not the (academic) consumers of such space. This state of affairs shows a discrepancy between the lived and the conceived space.

It is evident therefore that in many parts of the world offices are of significant importance to those who inhabit them, including academics, with the justifiable reasons mentioned in the preceding discussions. It is also evident that the sort of offices best suited to the needs of academics are better known to academics themselves than people outside academe such as those who design and plan for the creation of these spaces. It also needs to be remembered that there are differences of opinion within the ranks in an institution or organisation and even those who are in academe have different views about what constitutes the ideal office space in which academic work should take place.

It is not only office space that affects practice and thus the discussion in the next section is on the provision of the general physical space and its effect on practice.



### **3.2.2 The general physical space and effect on practice**

The consideration of and the debates about the nature and use of physical space suggests the acknowledgement of an existing relationship between the characteristics of physical workplace and the activities that take place in that space. In this regard, Alexander and Price (2012: 38) bring into the discourse the concept of functional comfort which is about how the physical space is supportive to those who work in it. They refer to space as a tool that helps users get their work done. They mention that such space should meet the daily requirements which include a well-placed and correctly positioned computer, appropriate lighting and ergonomic furniture. If these requirements are met, Alexander and Price (2012) argue, there will be functional comfort and a high level of employee performance. In short, organizational productivity will be notable and will have reason to improve. The opposite is also true, namely, that in the absence of a well constituted working environment, performance will decline and stress, the occurrence of errors and fatigue at work will escalate. All these issues of functional comfort relate to environmental psychology, a field that is noticeably relevant in studying the significance of the nature and conditions of the work environment on practice.

In regard to environmental psychology, Vischer (2008) uses the concept of environmental comfort and mentions physical, functional and psychological elements of comfort as working together towards ensuring individual productivity. Psychological comfort in particular involves the ability to have “territory”, that is a feeling that individuals have privacy and control of their environment and that their status is not compromised. As such, for environmental comfort people tend to personalise their offices or create them in ways that reflect their personalities (see also Hills & Levy 2014).

Also, Vischer (2008: 98) mentions studies in environmental psychology where concerns about space included environmental conditions such as noise, lighting, air quality and thermal comfort. There is a perceived link between spatial comfort and productivity: a view that in addition to healthy and safe buildings, people also need an environment that is supportive of the activities they perform in those buildings (Hills & Levy 2014; Leblebici 2012; Vischer 2008: 98; Vischer 2007). The physical workspace should be designed in a way that positively affects people’s feelings about their work, their

performance, commitment and the creation of new knowledge at work (Vischer 2008: 99). This is another issue that relates to environmental psychology.

It can be argued therefore that the relationship between physical space and practice is influenced by individual experiences and personalities. Wells and Thelen (2002) note that since the 1960s, research has revealed the effects of the physical environment on personality and also the effects of personality on individual's preferences and uses of the physical environment. For example, Hills and Levy (2014: 419) mention research that has shown that some people become emotionally attached to their workplace and personalize it, an action that varies according to individual personality, age, gender and/or culture. As indicated in section 2.4.2, some become so attached to their workplaces that they "self-categorise" them to signal their own identity which marks their distinctiveness and status. Kudryavtsev, Stedman and Krasny (2012) identify two forms of this attachment that people construct between themselves and the environment. First is place dependence which Kudryavtsev et al. (2012: 231) define as "the potential of a place to satisfy an individual's needs by providing settings for his or her preferred activities." For example, an academic may be attached to a particular space in his/her office or institution or home because he/she works better in that space. His or her productivity depends on that space. According to Hills and Levy (ibid) employees' satisfaction with their physical environment, their job and their overall performance improves if they are allowed to express that kind of attachment, that is, their personalities and emotions within their work environment. They refer to this act of personalizing space as territorialism. They argue that, compared to shared space, personalized space reduces conflict at work.

The second form of place attachment is place identity, "the extent to which a place becomes part of personal identity or embodied in the definition of the self" (Kudryavtsev et al. 2012: 231). Place identity therefore refers to more than just a preferred place but that particular place reflects the kind of a person an academic (in the case of this study) believes he or she is. Hull, Lam and Vigo (1994: 109) define place identity as "the contribution of place attributes to one's self-identity."

These relations of people to place and space are sometimes regarded as affecting their creativity. Taher (2008: 9) is of the opinion that the built environment (physical space)

is able to affect people's creativity and therefore contributes towards innovative outcomes. He notes a relationship between the features of space and the characteristic behaviour it elicits. He uses a particular example of research published by the University of Minnesota. In the study, ceiling height was perceived as having the possible potential to change people's cognitive functioning. It was found that higher ceilings stimulate creativity and activate freedom and relational processing. Lower ceilings, on the other hand, were viewed as confining and restrictive.

Another physical environmental feature mentioned in the example given by Taher (ibid) is that of windows. He states that windows in a workspace were viewed as symbolising freedom and releasing the space user from the immediate world to a wider and different world. Similarly, Newsham, Brand, Donnelly, Veitch and Charles (2009) suggest that having windows in the workspace improves job satisfaction and interest. The opposite applies to the lack of windows and the lack of access to sunlight in a work environment.

The research cited by Taher also reported a connection between the colour and texture of the interior of the space and the quality of the work accomplished in that space. People who pay attention to colour and texture of the physical space in which they work feel better and work more productively than those who are oblivious to the colour and texture of the physical space. For example it was found that texture of wood had a positive effect on creativity because of a strong biological affinity that people had for nature. Employees also preferred nurturing colours such as aqueous greens and iridescent blues because they reminded them of the calming influence of water. Taher's examples in this discussion derive from the field of interior design and architecture. However the examples cited are relevant to this study because the activities that are influenced by these design and architectural aspects, namely thinking, creativity and innovation, are fundamental to academic practice.

The section below is specific to HE's physical space and academic practices.

### **3.2.3 Higher education and the use of the physical spaces**

As indicated earlier, not much literature could be accessed for this review concerning academics and the physical space in HE. Literature that could be accessed in this

review regarding the physical space in HE is mainly about students rather than academics (Brooks 2010, Cox 2011; Jamieson 2003; Jamieson, Fisher, Gilding, Taylor & Trevitt 2000; Zhang 2014). Such literature mainly reports findings related to students' perceptions and experiences of the use of physical instructional space. For example, from their research, Laiqa, Shah and Khan (2011: 710) found a positive relationship between the quality of space wherein the activity of learning is conducted and student achievement in HE. According to their findings, students' learning is improved in a well-designed, appropriately lit, ventilated and furnished space. However, in an observation that relates to academics working in contact institutions Sawers et al. (2013) determined that the physical spaces influence the teaching methods. Conducive physical spaces enhance an academic's inclination to pursue in-class collaborative activities with students and this in turn assists students with blended learning. This way, Jessop, Gubby and Smith (2011) argue, space does not constrain "the art of the possible" but encourages creativity and innovation.

Another example that may be associated with academics' relation to the physical space in contact institutions is that the traditional design of university lecture theatres and tutorial rooms has been found to manifest student-teacher power relations where a teacher-centred approach dominates (Jamieson 2003: 121; Harrison & Cairns 2008). The layout and design of the traditional lecture theatres leads to certain expectations from the teacher and from students about each other's roles and actions. These traditional lecture theatres in which the lecturer stands before the students who are an audience, are seen as authorising and enabling particular behaviours and constraining others (Jamieson *ibid*). They encourage that the teacher should present in front of students and students should listen attentively and passively (Jamieson 2003). This way it portrays an identity of a teacher which has power over a student. Depending on the interpretation a teacher makes of that scenario, it may be seen as in line with Lefebvre's (1991: 143) argument that space authorises some laws by implying certain order.

Many HE institutions experience a number of challenges with their physical spaces to the extent that they find it difficult to meet the combined needs of academics, students and other employees in the institutions. The section below presents some such challenges.

### **3.2.4 Physical space challenges in higher education**

There are challenges that, particularly, contact HE institutions face regarding physical space for academic practices. These challenges according to Chiddick (2006: 8) are caused by ‘exogenous’ (originating beyond the institution) and ‘endogenous’ (“emerging from within academia”) factors. The exogenous factors include a global trend of massification of HE (increasing student enrolment figures) in pursuit of producing more knowledge and skills for the development of societies (cf. Mohamedbhai 2014). This is an exogenous factor because it emanates from national governments’ policies that encourage widening participation, especially by those population groups that historically had little or restricted access to HE. Considering the fact that some HEIs were built as far back as the 1950s when only a limited number of people could or chose to access HE, their space may not be adequate to accommodate the increasing university population of current times.

This challenge of increased student numbers may not directly apply to ODL institutions’ physical spaces but, where possible, when student numbers increase the number of academic staff has to also increase proportionately in both contact and ODL institutions. Unfortunately, in some countries, especially in Africa, HE is not adequately financed to cater for the ever-increasing university populations generally due to financial and political crises (Mohamedbhai 2008; 2014). In addition, many international donors and funding agencies focus on promoting basic and secondary education in the developing countries where they believe there are more economic returns than in HE (Mohamedbhai 2008; 2014). An example given by Mohamedbhai (2008; 2014: 61) to illustrate this fact, is that of the World Bank which reduced its proportion of funds allocated for HE from 17% between 1985 and 1989 to 7% between 1995 and 1999.

Oliff, Palacios, Johnson and Leachman (2013) also note the trend in the United States (US) where government funding per student decreased by 28% compared to 2008 due to the global recession. In an African context, Mohamedbhai (2014) demonstrates the consequences of reduced or withdrawn funding for HE as including the inadequacy of the physical infrastructure to meet the needs of the present HE population.

Secondly, the issue of commodification of academic work, as discussed in Chapter 1, can be regarded as one of the endogenous factors that determine space requirements in HE. It is endogenous because, although institutions respond to government funding policies, they seek to increase their cash flow through different means, such as government subsidies and research grants from international donor agencies. For example, Radder (2010) indicates that since the 1980s most western universities started the process of commodifying a variety of their practices such as research, teaching, administration, sport programmes and others. As such, it is not uncommon for institutions to hire research productive academics so that they attract more funds for research and in turn produce more money for the institution. These academics need to be provided with adequate physical space to enable them to perform their tasks.

Other endogenous factors mentioned by Chiddick (2006: 10) include “changes in the nature of [the] academic discipline” (for example the incorporation of ICTs in a discipline). Such changes according to Chiddick may cause the disciplines to need either more or less space than the usual to undertake the same quantity of teaching and research as before. Unfortunately institutions have not been able to predict what kind and how much physical space they would need in the future (Chiddick 2006).

Section 3.2 and its sub-sections have focussed on the relationship between the physical spaces and practice in HE and other organisations. In the next section research on the second dimension of space, conceived space, is reviewed to understand how it relates to practice.

### **3.3 CONCEIVED SPACE AND ACADEMIC PRACTICE**

Conceived space, as indicated in chapter 2, includes plans and policies about the allocation and use of space. Policies in HE include those directives that determine and provide guidelines regarding the form and layout of the physical space in question. For example, Temple (2007) gives an example of the University Grant Committee (UGC) in the UK which developed guidelines on the requirements for the total floor space by subject, areas of speciality, teaching areas, libraries, staff offices and other university functions. Such guidelines were based on assumptions about teaching and learning needs, such as student contact hours, teaching day and term lengths and other

curricula-space issues. There is no indication that the views of academics were sought to inform such decision making. Instead focus on those policies or guidelines was on maximising the use of space and minimising costs as much as possible.

Research by Neary and Sauners (2011: 332) which included twelve universities across the UK examined the extent to which academics were involved in the conceptualization, design and provision of teaching and learning spaces. This research was initiated due to three related developments in the UK. First, there was a trend in which different physical spaces were being developed in response to the possibilities offered by new technologies on teaching and learning. Second, students' demands for collaborative and immersive learning experiences were emerging. Third, academics' required interdisciplinary research and CE projects. These three major demands resulted in the available physical spaces becoming inadequate. It became evident that academic spaces were designed without communicating with or consulting academics. The decisions were taken solely by individual estate managers. An estate manager interviewed in the course of the research was of the opinion that academics did not know much about space and that they were only knowledgeable about activities that take place in space rendering their opinion on the matter negligible. This view was also stated in one particular instance where an academic who was interviewed in their study indicated that what was needed was communication between academics and the estate managers before a final decision is made about the establishment and provision of physical structures, but most often that was not the case (Neary & Sauners 2011: 332).

Another example of a conceived space was introduced in chapter 1 where the changes from the traditional perception of academe were mentioned. These macro-level changes which have included changes in HE policy have affected university practices at a micro level. For example, the managerialist approach which currently characterises academe has led to the quantitative measurement of academic work to secure and attract funding and 'customers' or clients to the institutions. Kogan and Techler (2007: 3) suggest that managerialism is "the unnecessary assertion of power by hierarchs and the creation of doctrines that emphasize modes of evaluation associated with mechanistic forms of outcome assessment or unreflexive forms of work process – without regard to the wishes and abilities of individual or group members of the organisation." As such, in some cases, managerialism functions with limited consultation with the affected

academics. Managerialism in academe is effected through policies such as the IPMS where academics have to project their academic performances and outputs against set standards of, most often, administratively or organisationally decided outcomes or key performance areas. This policy, although local to a specific university, originates from national regulations regarding funding practices in HE. This situation suggests that some of the changes that have been effected in HE spaces are decided upon by people in power as well as entities independent of HE and not by academics themselves. An examination and reporting of the concerns or experiences of academics could reveal their individual perceptions about the allocation, regulation and use of such space (see Davis, Leach & Clegg 2011; Laing 2006). Neary and Sauners (2011) have indicated that usually decisions about the nature and use of space are made by the estates managers based on their interpretations, perceptions and assumptions of how employees work and are not based on research or professional input or input from the affected individuals (Davis, Leach & Clegg 2011: 194). Although Davis et al. make no specific reference to academic space, their view correlates with what happens in an academic context. For example, Ylijoki (2013) argues that managerialism in HE is accompanied by a significant amount of paperwork related to issues such as evaluations, strategic plans and self-reports, which all take academics a great deal of time to complete. Academics experience this obligatory administrative work as reducing time for research and teaching. This point takes the discussion to the next section where time as a metaphorical space is discussed. The discussion in the next section also includes a focus on how the physical and the conceived space are lived or experienced in relation to practice in HE and other contexts.

### **3.4 PERSPECTIVES ON LIVED AND METAPHORICAL SPACE**

*...the academic ideal entails 'an ethic of self-imposed dedication, a participation in the quest for the Holy Grail, a person committed to a cause that transcends all other interests and considerations.' Thus, a true academic is a person who dedicates himself (rarely herself) to scholarly pursuits, perhaps suffering from intellectual struggles, but gamely continuing the vigorous quest in order to make a significant contribution to the advancement of science, and*



*to acquire respect within one's scientific community.* (Ylijoki 2013: 247)

The extract above introduces some of the conceptions people have about academic identity and theoretical space. Ylijoki (2013: 247) challenges this conception as it seems to assume that academic work overshadows the life of an academic and it is controlled by “the internal logic of scholarly work, not by demands and deadlines imposed externally.” A similar challenge is raised by Anderson (2006) who argues that the notion of a university as a place where time moves in leisurely manner is long gone. I opened this section with this extract because I do not intend to repeat the issues that have already featured in sections 3.2 and 3.3 about the lived space. Instead emphasis in this section will be on the metaphorical aspect of the lived space in the form of time and opportunities for academic identity development in HE.

#### **3.4.1 Time, opportunities and academic identity development in higher education**

Academic work (research, tuition and related activities) and academic identity development demand time for thinking, creativity and innovation (Le Roux 2008; Madikizela-Madiya 2014). Referring to the field of architecture, Mozaffar, Hosseini and Bisadi (2013) define creativity as a process that leads to ideas that are novel and useful, while innovation is the successful application and implementation of those ideas. This definition applies to HE creativity, criticality and innovation as well (see Jones, Lefoe, Harvey & Ryland 2012). Both creativity and innovation demand critical and creative thinking (Adams 2005). They are critical concepts in HE where, as indicated in section 3.3 above, there has been a call for research that is innovative and relevant to society as well as courses that are appealing to students. Therefore, academics who are to conduct such research and develop such courses need to be creative, innovative and critical. As alluded to earlier in this chapter, space is one of the factors that influence the execution and success of these three aspects (thinking, creativity and innovation) in the academic context. The discussion in this section is premised on the notion that views of both individuals and groups need to be examined regarding suitability and availability of space for their practice in relation to these three aspects.

Ylijoki (2013: 245) and Gonzalez et al. (2014) mention that academics are faced with a great deal of pressure as they develop their identities by engaging in practices associated with the field of HE. Pressure in academe is generally caused by an overall acceleration of academic work which leads to a lack of time and the imposition of pressure on academics' time to be involved in academic activities (Ylijoki *ibid*). Managerialism in academe, as discussed in section 3.3, has implied a "speeding up of academic work." Furthermore, academics compete for scarce resources (physical and monetary) and positions in universities which add to the experience of pressure. As such, to stand a better chance of obtaining a share in those scarce resources and positions academics are obliged to achieve more and deliver better results in a shorter period of time. In short, they need to produce more publications in high impact journals, supervise more masters and doctoral students, be involved in international networks, and secure mutually beneficial contacts with funding bodies (Ylijoki *ibid*). All these have been mentioned as challenging for academics' time and planning.

A direct consequence of the apparent lack of time is that it impedes the process of academic identity construction. This view is affirmed by Clancy (2010: 1) who notes that, in addition to the challenges with relation to the access to and use of physical space (as discussed in section 3.3), academics are also struggling to negotiate sufficient time to carry out their academic responsibilities and practices. He suggests therefore that the creation of necessary physical space should go together with the creation of time. Similarly Alexander and Price (2012: 37) note that in organizational research an analysis of physical environments inside organizations shows a need for accommodation to provide "not only space (*topos*), but also the time, attention from leaders and opportunities for relationship building needed to facilitate the creation of new knowledge." However, the present situation in HE is that time is limited. As a result, Ylijoki (2013: 247) argues:

*Faced with constant time pressure, [academics] tend to focus on the present, not having much time to reflect on the past nor to anticipate the future. In this sense, 'a tyranny of the moment' ... emerges, while the present and the tasks involved in it take a prominent place in many academics' work experiences.*

When this form of focus happens, it seems that academic identity construction through reflection and projection (which are both essential in academe) is challenged, marginalized or even negated.

To compensate for the lack of time, however, academics in Gonzalez et al.'s (2014) study "outsmart" the situation by spending the majority of their available time on research and grants writing rather than on other practices such as teaching and advising. They try to procure grants and also take academic research leave. They work extra hours, including weekends and holidays, on research activities. In Gornall and Salisbury's (2012) study self-directed and self-managed time and a choice of space were highly valued by participants, but these occurred outside conventional university hours and space. It is therefore a different case from that suggested by Anderson (2006). Ylijoki (ibid) also argues that her study revealed that it is ideal that individual academics pursue their own interests at their own pace or rhythm. When this happens, there will be no need for laments about long hours of academic work because they will come naturally as part of the identity of an academic. Long hours will not come as external constraints "but an expression of one's own enthusiasm, commitment and internal motivation" (Ylijoki 2013: 248).

It is interesting, however, that Anderson (2006) argues that academe is the only field or profession where no attempt is made to control employees' working time. This is interesting because, as was indicated in chapter 1, the institution where this study took place indeed does control academics' minimum working time. Anderson's point therefore must be seen in context. She argues that academics have freedom to determine their own working time and that it must have been found unnecessary to control such time because academics are known for spilling work time over to personal (leisure) time. Such spill over does not only happen with time but space as well. Academics find themselves working at home (space) outside of formal working hours (time). Mostly this situation is caused by excessive work load that academics find themselves having to handle within a limited time as stated. The next section is focused on the issue of work load.

### **3.4.2 Work load and support as metaphorical space**

Time constraints as discussed above are compared to the amount and nature of work that academics have to do as they develop their academic identities in the institutions. Gonzalez et al. (2014) mention that academics are evaluated mostly according to the success of the strategies they institute to improve the performance of mediocre students than those strategies introduced to enhance the performance of top achievers. Yet, some academics feel that they lack the necessary support in the form of human resources and infrastructure to perform according to institutional expectations. Gonzalez et al. (ibid) argue that, despite the heavy work load that academics are subjected to and about which they consistently complain, they are expected to be superior researchers who generate significant funds for the universities. Some argue that this expectation and requirement is unrealistic and inhumane (see also Anderson 2006). More especially, work load is cited as the most strenuous factor in academe as it relates to a lack of time for crucial reading, reflection and writing (Anderson 2006).

Another pressure observed by Ylijoki (2013: 246) is the rapid progress in science where new theories, new models and new conceptualisations are constantly developing and demanding that academics should be engaged continuously in keeping updated on new developments. Research results rapidly become outdated making it difficult to keep abreast. Although such change is regarded as positive and necessary in any scientific field, Ylijoki argues that it creates anxiety and worry among, more especially, senior academics.

To accommodate the work demands against time pressure some academics avoid climbing the career ladder, especially to professorship, but chose to remain in the margins for the sake of autonomy and academic freedom (Ylijoki 2013). It can therefore be argued that, as has been indicated in relation to physical space, the availability and quality of the lived space sometimes depends on the individual's choices. For example, Preston and Price (2012) mention that some academics choose to take temporal and part time management roles (such as heading the departments) within faculties. This move usually does not relieve them of the responsibilities of research publishing and, sometimes, teaching. They often receive limited training relating to and/or socialization into those temporal roles but are expected to support Deans and other senior managers in their faculties. Preston and Price refer to these academics as player-managers and, although some, at times, are obliged to take up these positions, the concern is that

involvement in those temporal management positions consumes time that could otherwise be used for research and publication, which are more crucial for academic growth. But this is also a personal matter because some regard such involvement as progress in their profession, and thus a positive metaphorical space.

Another example of personal choices of metaphorical space is noted by Smith (2012: 156), who argues that while academic identities are becoming increasingly corporate and depoliticised, this move is regarded by some researchers “as a welcome challenge to the exclusivity and elitism that has traditionally dominated universities.” In other words some regard the managerialism as opening up rather than limiting space. This relates to the argument that space is not a one-size-fits-all.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the issues discussed above affect mainly the contact institutions where students and academic staff meet on a daily basis or, at least, regularly. But, how do different dimensions of space relate to academic identity construction and practices in ODL contexts? The section below addressed this question.

### **3.5 ODL UNIVERSITY SPACE AS A RESEARCH FOCUS**

The discussion in this section focuses on the debates about academic work in ODL contexts and how academics go about constructing their identities in those contexts. A review of available literature indicated that there is a dearth of literature on research and other practices in ODL. Mainly it is the issues related to teaching and learning that dominate literature concerning ODL and which were therefore reviewed.

#### **3.5.1 Teaching and academic identity development in ODL contexts**

ODL, as described in Chapter 1, is a process that eliminates constraints related to distance and time between the university, staff and students. One of the ways in which such constraints are eliminated is through the use of technology. For example, in their definition (which does not refute that given in Chapter 1) Danaher and Umah (2010: 12) regard ODL as comprising:

*...forms of educational provision that use contemporary technologies to enact varied combinations of synchronous and*

*asynchronous communication and on learners and educators physically separated from one another for part or all of the educational experience.*

According to this characterisation of ODL it would be expected that academics in ODL institutions focus their academic identity development on advancing the process of teaching and learning rather than research. There is, however, a suggestion that academics in ODL should also be developed through training or continuous professional development. Hossain (2010) argues, "...unless, and until, university teachers can develop themselves professionally keeping pace with the modern world, they cannot be expected to contribute well to the education of the youth." This suggestion by Hossain is even more relevant for ODL institutions than contact institutions because, as indicated by Danaher and Umah (ibid), ODL institutions depend mainly on the use of technology for teaching and related practices and technology changes continuously. However, training towards professional development is usually under-estimated in ODL (Latchem & Jung 2010: 78). When it does happen, Latchem and Jung argue, it needs to be linked to institutional strategic planning, human resource management and quality assurance systems. It must be on-going and multimodal. But in some instances these necessities are not followed, mainly due to lack of financial, human, physical and technological resources (Nyaruwata 2013). For example, from research conducted in various countries, Perraton and Creed (1999) determined that academics in ODL institutions receive training in areas such as pedagogy, materials development, and good writing practices. However, their training and development depends on whether the institution is in a developing or industrialised country. Institutions in industrialised countries have the required resources through which they train their staff to ensure that they are equipped with the necessary expertise. Such resources also allow for training to be repeated when necessary.

On the other hand, in developing countries where resources are limited, staff receives limited training; usually once off. In some of those countries, such as Zimbabwe, institutions often lack the resources required for developing even the most basic e-learning infrastructure and providing permanent buildings for teaching and learning (Nyaruwata 2013). This lack becomes a constraint on academics' identity development which requires, amongst others, training on ICTs. For example, Archibong, Ogbiji and

Anijaobi-Idem (2010: 110) argue that the use of ICTs by teachers does not only improve learning outcomes for students but also enhances work productivity, reduces isolation and increases professional satisfaction for the teacher (also see Vajargah, Jahani & Azadmanesh 2010; Hossain 2010). Similarly, Ylijoki (2013: 246) argues that ICTs accelerate “the tempo and rhythm of academic work substantially”, which is a necessary change in the present day context of managerialised HE.

ICT competency and training form a greater part of an ODL academic’s identity formation. For example, in their paper on ODL academics, De Hart and Steyn (2011) highlight the fact that ODL students are increasingly adapting to and relying on different ICTs for their learning and consequently universities (academics) are compelled to use ICTs in order to meet students’ diverse learning needs. While they do that, as Archibong, Ogbiji and Anijaobi-Idem (2010) and Vajargah, Jahani and Azadmanesh (2010) argue, they also become professionally advanced in utilising ICTs, and that way develop professional skills.

On the other hand, Perraton and Creed (1999: 7) also indicate that some ODL institutions are not dedicated only to distance teaching but include dual modes of delivery, that is, both contact and distance. In those cases some academics who are unfamiliar with either of the contexts find themselves having to adapt to unfamiliar modes of teaching. Fallows and Robinson (2013: 144) regard such situations as an advantage for the development of an academic identity because each academic has an opportunity to develop teaching skills on both modes. They argue, “For many teachers, a commitment to openness represents a considerable expansion of opportunity and may yield the space and time necessary for professional upgrading, personal study and research.” Perraton and Creed (1999) on the other hand determined in their study that teaching in dual modes reduces teachers’ time for other responsibilities such as attending meetings, training, research and writing. This issue may, therefore, be seen as subjective and depending on the choices of individual academics, especially in cases where they are not compelled to use both modes of teaching.

Perraton and Creed (1999: 9) note that in the ODL institutions that participated in their study academics are trained individually and in groups through workshops, one-on-one guidance and through training materials. Such training begins with group induction of

'novices' through lectures and activity-based training. Thereafter, training is done per subject, with academics engaging in actual course development. The form of training again depends on affordability, which leads to non-affording institutions relying mainly on group training. That way, opportunities for academic identity development are limited in those institutions where funding to support individual training is limited.

On the other hand, academics themselves may make choices that constrain the possibility for their academic identity development. From some dual mode institutions Perraton and Creed found that some senior academics resist participating in training, particularly in group workshops on ICTs. Similarly, Bingimlas (2009) found resistance together with attitudes and beliefs as barriers to integration of ICT in teaching and learning even though his focus was not on ODL institutions (see also Mnyanyi, Bakari & Mbwette 2011). Refusal of training in Perraton and Creed's (1999: 9) research was attributed to factors such as status (where academics prefer to be trained individually by people of similar academic status); time constraints due to teaching loads and clash in culture between face-to-face teaching and distant teaching in dual-mode institutions (see also Unal & Ozturk 2012).

In addition to resistance from the academics' side, Perraton and Creed also found that in some ODL institutions there are also structural challenges related, more especially, to the implementation of ICTs. Referring to the case of the Open University of Tanzania, Mnyanyi, Bakari and Mbwette (2011) mention challenges including infrastructure, human resources and low budget as contributing to the problem of ICT implementation. Similarly Perraton and Creed (1999) mention limited support from institutional managements (in the form of incentives for the trained academics and "corresponding operational mechanisms") and the attitude, expectations, knowledge and behaviour of those who have not undergone training. These findings suggest that the development of academics through training in ODL processes is challenged both by their own choices as well as institutional barriers. This can also be linked to Latchem and Jung's (2010: 175) point that academic staff training needs to take into account academics' motivation, their learning capabilities and styles, time constraints and available resources.



Like in contact universities, ODL academics are expected to engage in research activities. The following section looks at perspectives related to space for research in the ODL context.

### **3.5.2 Research and academic identity construction in ODL contexts**

Strongman, Young and Kobeleva (2011) argue that research is essential in any tertiary institution to generate knowledge and secure local and international peer recognition and to inform teaching. Without research it would be difficult for institutions to offer up-to-date and coherent curricula, anticipate learning trends and to ensure that knowledge is disseminated to staff, students and other significant stakeholders (Strongman, Young & Kobeleva 2011: 57; Prinsloo & Coetzee 2013). Moreover, research is a practice that typifies the identity of faculty. Noting this significance of research, Prinsloo and Coetzee (2013: 1356) argue,

Within the context of the changing higher education landscape, research into ODL as a phenomenon or as ODL praxis is no longer a nice-to-have, but a crucial ingredient in contributing to ODL practitioners' understanding of the changing nature and role of teaching and learning, and in redefining faculty, their roles, the roles of administrative and support staff, students and the expectations of broader society.

However, in developing countries, funding from business and international organisations is limited and consequently opportunities for research are limited, whereas the situation appears to be rather different in developed countries that generally have sufficient resources to support research practices (Latchem & Jung 2010; Nyaruwata 2012; Strongman, Young & Kobeleva 2011).

Discussions in this section and in section 3.5.2 above show the ways in which both academics and institutional contexts enable and constrain academic identity development. However, the way in which physical spaces are experienced by academics who work in them seems to be negated in ODL research. Besides the physical space, there is generally little known about ODL academics' experiences of space in ODL institutions. This view is noted by Ng (2006) (cf. Bezuidenhout 2013) who compares learning effectiveness and student satisfaction with those of academics and

states that much less is known about academics' experiences in ODL institutions. However, Ng (2006: 2) argues, "If students' quality of learning is intricately tied to faculty's teaching effectiveness and research productivity, then it is crucial to understand and improve its faculty members' work environment." Ng acknowledges some research that has been done to examine academic's experiences in online teaching in traditional institutions but argues that little has been done to examine the working conditions of academics in distance education institutions. Although Ng does not specifically refer to space, his argument indicates the manner in which research related to the working conditions of academics in ODL institutions is limited. Also, Bezuidenhout (2013: 19) confirms, for instance, that many new appointees who have been working in contact universities before "struggle to make sense of the multitude of expectations in the ODL University" due to limited orientation and induction in some institutions.

Some of the experiences and perspectives that are worth discussing in this section are those of academics working from home or off-campus. The next sub-section is dedicated to this topic.

### **3.5.3 Working from home or off-campus in ODL contexts**

There are ODL academics who, by choice or institutional necessity and policies, work from home or elsewhere off-campus. These academics are referred to as telecommuters, or e-academics or teleworkers (see Kanuka, Judgev, Heller and West 2008; Tustin 2014). Certain institutions give some of their full time and best academics the option of telecommuting "in efforts to retain [them], as well as recruit promising new academics" (Kanuka, Judgev, Heller & West 2008: 150). There is, however, not much written about telecommuting and Tustin (2014:1) argues that literature on its potential and impact is largely limited to international examples.

Tustin (2014) conducted a study at UNISA on academics' experiences of telecommuting. Amongst his findings was that academics appreciated uninterrupted time that was offered from working from off-campus offices. This finding is similar to that reported by Gornall and Salisbury (2012) where many academics indicated that they were most productive when working from home. Such productivity is evidenced in

practices that include writing for publication, compiling reports, conducting fieldwork, the collection and transcribing of data, writing up field notes and reading (Gornall & Salisbury 2012: 144; Kanuka, Judgev, Heller & West 2008). In Tustin's study it was similarly evidenced that academics were more productive and concentrated better when they worked from home than when they occupied on-campus offices. Gornall and Salisbury note that no description of on-campus work matched the reports of working practice that took place "out of sight" at home, and generally at night. Even those academics in management positions are reported to have mentioned working away from their offices as being more productive than working on-campus.

The option of working from home is also described by Kanuka, Judgev, Heller and West (2008) as attractive to academics because it creates flexibility in personal and family scheduling. "Employees working in home offices reported more positive views about family and personal life... than employees working in a traditional office" (Ng 2006: 3). Gornall and Salisbury (2012) however found in their research that academics make a distinction between working from home (where the work office is based at home) and working at home (where office work is done at home). Some participants did not buy into the idea of working from home. Gornall and Salisbury (2012: 141) stated that a number of participants in their study indicated their desire to return to campus "when no-one is there in order to 'work in peace', away from the constant e-mail inflow or messaging at home (or perhaps to escape other family intrusions)." Although Gornall and Salisbury's project was not focused on ODL academics, it still illustrates people's perspectives about working off-campus as would be the case with some ODL academics. Their study found that the indicators of the productivity of working off-campus were evidenced by the time and volume of e-mails sent, number of articles written or essays marked.

While many academics in Gornall and Salisbury's study indicated that there were numerous advantages to working off-campus, there were others who indicated a preference for working from an on-campus office. Gornall and Salisbury (2012: 145) state:

*...while the need 'to concentrate and be free of interruptions' was raised by many informants, for a few, interruptions were regarded*

*as welcome. Such interventions from the outside world when otherwise absorbed in other detail could be regarded as valuable breaks, which prevented doing any one thing to excess...Thus, whilst a dominant narrative about 'interruptions' saw these as distracting and unproductive, the unusual individuals above suggested that it was possible to be highly focused and able to break on and off without this detracting from overall concentration or productivity.*

Tustin (2014) also reports some problems identified by academics with regard to telecommuting. These include challenges with network connectivity for digital connection; lack of office equipment at home and limited social interaction with colleagues. This is an example of a lived space (Lefebvre 1991) and an indication that academics' experiences of space cannot be taken for granted because it can be subjective. While some prefer working from home, others prefer working on-campus for specific reasons.

### **3.6 PERSONALITY TRAITS AND ACADEMIC IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION**

Louinsbury, Levy, Leong, and Gibson (2007: 52) argue that personality traits contribute significantly in identity construction. The prominent personality traits that are said to influence people's behaviour and identity development are called the Big Five and are grouped as follows (Komarraju & Karau 2005: 558):

- Neuroticism (emotional stability and impulse control in unpleasant circumstances);
- Extraversion (sociability or seeking stimulation from others; adopting surgency and assertiveness);
- Openness (intellectual curiosity, creativity or adventure, being imaginative);
- Conscientiousness (self-discipline, dependability, being organised, preference to plan ahead) and
- Agreeableness (compassion and cooperation, helpfulness and trusting)

These personality traits are regarded as impacting of job performance and job satisfaction and are applicable across different social-cultural settings (Lounsbury et. al 2007). For example, Khoyneshad, Rajaei and Sarvarazemy (2012: 84) found a correlation between religiousness and conscientiousness trait and argue that religious people are “more responsible and have greater achievements in their life than others.” However, the Big Five are not the only traits that literature has identified as influential in performance and behaviour. Lounsbury, Sundstrom, Loveland and Gibson (2003: 69) also identify what they refer to as the narrow personality traits. Among the narrow traits they mention aggression (inclination to harm when provoked); optimism (positive prospects about the future); tough-mindedness (basing decisions on facts rather than feelings values or intuition) and work drive (industriousness and willingness to expend extra time and effort to meet achievement-related goals) (Lounsbury et al. 2003: 69). Even though these narrow personality traits can be linked in one way or another to the Big Five, they are regarded as an addition to the Big Five.

### **3.7 CLOSING COMMENTS**

The discussion in this chapter revealed that space, in its different dimensions, is a significant aspect of institutional practice and academic identity construction. Different debates about the kind of office spaces suitable for academic work were presented. The discussion also showed that the regulations about space in HE may be there, but academics who are the end-users of such space are not usually involved in decision making regarding the design or provisioning of the space.

With regard to ODL institutions, very little has been written about the value of physical space on practices towards academic identity construction. On the other hand, contextual factors (such as funds) and academics’ personal factors (such as preferences and choices) sometimes constrain academic development especially on issues related to ICT and its implementation on academic activities. The discussion also indicated that some academics who work from home opt to return to and work on campus, while some are more contented and are more productive when they work off-campus. Theories regarding personality traits and their effect on practice were also discussed in this chapter. In the next chapter the methodology that was used in the process of this study is presented.



## CHAPTER 4

### AN ACCOUNT OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN, APPROACH AND PROCESS

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#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to investigate the way in which different dimensions of space enable or constrain teaching, research and related academic practices in an ODL university. These practices were understood as related to the development of academic identities, and it was conjectured, that space, in all its dimensions, had a significant role in enabling or constraining the execution thereof. It was argued that unless the concept space is problematized, its effects on teaching, research and related practices, and thus on academic identity construction, may not be fully understood. As a way of contributing knowledge to this effect, the present study was conducted guided by the following critical research question:

*How does space in a specific ODL context enable or constrain academic practices around which academics construct their identities?*

The subsidiary questions presented in the first chapter (cf. Chapter 1: 1.4) were:

- How is academic identity understood and constructed in a specific College of the ODL Institution?
- How is space conceptualised in the College?
- How do the Institutional and the College policies define and relate to the utilisation of space?
- How do academics' personal traits influence their response to the Institutional and the College policies on space?
- How should space be managed or created for optimal academic identity construction in the College?

In this chapter a detailed account of the research methodology that was followed in the process of the study is presented. The chapter comprises seven sections, including this introduction, as follows:

- The presentation of the philosophical grounding of the research methodology used in this study;
- The discussion of the research design, the research approach and the research methods;
- The issues of rigour in the study which include transferability, confirmability, credibility and dependability;
- The processes that were followed in consideration of ethical issues during the research process;
- Reflections on the process of the study and lastly;
- The closing comments on the chapter.

#### **4.2 PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Researchers' philosophical assumptions or theoretical paradigm, implicitly or explicitly, influences the process of research and the interpretation of its findings (Creswell 2014; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba 2011). According to Creswell (2014) the research plan should be thought of through philosophical worldviews (or paradigms, Lincoln et al. *ibid*) that a researcher brings to the study which subsequently inform the design and the methods that will be employed in a research project (cf. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe 2002; Mackenzie & Knipe 2006; Merriam 2009). As such, researchers need to be certain about the philosophical positions they assume as they begin their research projects as well as the ontological and epistemological assumptions related to such philosophical stances (Crotty 1998). Epistemology, according to Ormston, Spencer, Barnard & Snape (2014: 6), provides the philosophical grounding for a researcher to decide on the kinds of knowledge that are possible and the ways in which learning about reality can be pursued. Ontology is about the nature of reality that is assumed to exist in the world (Crotty 1998; Ormston, Spencer, Barnard & Snape 2014).

There are a number of philosophical positions that can be adopted by researchers to guide their projects. To mention but a few, these philosophies or paradigms include social constructivism which is followed when a research involves social interaction in consideration of the cultural and historical background as key in the interpretation of the world (Creswell 2014: 21). This philosophical position was not suitable for this particular



study because although its ontology considers multiple meanings and the complexity of viewpoints (Creswell *ibid*), this study was not intended to analyse the “process” of interaction among participants which social constructivism addresses.

Another paradigm is positivism which assumes that reality is apprehendable as based on the cause and effect framework. The positivist epistemological assumption is that “things exist as meaningful entities independently of consciousness and experience, that they have truth and meaning residing in them as objects ..., and that careful ...research can attain that objective truth and meaning” (Crotty 1998: 5-6). Truth in the positivist view is observable and/or measurable and the researcher is able to study the object without influencing it or being influenced by it (Lincoln et al. 2011). A positivist stance could not be used in the research undertaken given the nature of the enquiry which was intended to understand academics’ perspectives of the research topic.

The philosophical stance adopted in this study, is postmodernism. A postmodernist philosophical view is that “one cannot tell large stories about the world but only small stories from heterogeneous ‘subject positions’ of individuals and plural social groups” (Agger 1991: 116; Doyle 2006). In other words, a single, objective and universal Truth does not exist. Instead there are personal, subjective, anti-realist and contextual truths. This philosophical position is in line with the epistemological notion which “denies that reason or any other method is a means of acquiring objective knowledge of ... reality [but] emphasises the subjectivity, conventionality, and incommensurability of [the] constructions” (Hicks 2004: 6). What postmodernism suggests, according to Agger (1991: 117), is that different individuals and groups will always have different experiences of the world according to the practices or discourses that constitute their experiences and according to their contextual identities. Also, postmodernism argues that all knowledge is contextual according to its historical and cultural nature (Agger 1991).

The conceptualisation of space as multidimensional rather than only an objective, measurable entity – especially the consideration of people’s experiences of space is postmodern. This is because different people will have different truths about the same space, depending on their subjective experiences of the space. The leading strategists of postmodernism included two French philosophers, Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and

Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) and the American philosopher, Richard Rorty (1931-2007) (Hicks 2004).

The next section contains discussions on the research design, research approach and research methods followed during the execution of this study.

#### **4.3 RESEARCH APPROACH, RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODS**

As indicated above the philosophical assumptions followed in a research also inform the design, approach and research methods to be followed. These research aspects are discussed in this section. The discussion begins with comments in relation to the research approach that was followed. Depending on the ontology and epistemology adopted for a research projects, a research approach may either be qualitative, quantitative or mixed. In this study a qualitative approach was followed.

##### **4.3.1 Qualitative research approach**

Qualitative research is a form of research in which a researcher becomes part of the research process together with the participants and the researcher personally collects and interprets the generated data (Corbin & Strauss 2015). The approach is characterized by openness, fluidity and an evolving nature compared to the rigid and structured nature of quantitative approach (Corbin & Strauss *ibid*). This study followed a qualitative approach because the intention was to understand and describe the enabling and constraining effects of space on academic identity construction by academics (Babbie 2010; Bryman 2012; Ryan, Coughla & Cronin 2007; Marshall & Rossman 2011; Punch 2005). Research participants represented the various categories of academics stratified according to post level. These academics were asked to provide their perspectives of the same phenomenon within an ODL Institution. These idiosyncratic perceptions could not be quantitatively measured. In the following section the study's design is discussed.

#### **4.3.2 Research design**

A research design defines the direction that a research project will take (Creswell 2014). It is described by Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012: 2) as a term that evokes expectations of a research plan that is clearly articulated, with well-designed choices and a clear rationale for such choices. For example, if the researcher chooses ethnography as a research design it should be clear what ethnographic research design entails and why it was chosen for a particular study.

A self-ethnographic research design was selected for this study and consequently, the conventions of ethnography were followed. Amongst the characteristics of ethnographic research is that it is conducted in a natural setting rather than in a laboratory, using the researcher's eyes and ears as the basic tools for data collection (LeCompte & Schensul 1999; 2010; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). The participants and the researcher interact and work face to face. This face to face contact should be sustained, be in context of participants' daily lives and allow for the development of trust between the researcher and the participants (Bryman 2012; O'Reilly 2012). Trust building is sometimes referred to as building rapport and it greatly depends on whether the researcher is an insider or an outsider in a research setting (LeCompte & Schensul 2010).

The other significant aspect of ethnography is that the researcher has a responsibility to ensure that, as far as possible, all the participants' voices are included in the research report (LeCompte & Schensul 2010). The reason for the inclusion of all voices is the realisation by ethnographers that no single perspective may represent the whole community (LeCompte & Schensul 2010: 16). Therefore, different perspectives and behaviours or "multivoices, polyvocality, or intragroup diversity" need to be recognised in the analysis and report (LeCompte & Schensul *ibid*).

According to LeCompte and Schensul (2010: 18), the ethnographic research process starts with a research question "and a series of hunches, guesses, initial hypotheses, models and concepts that [a researcher is] interested in exploring and that relate to the research problem." These authors argue that the "hunches and guesses" become the focus of the initial investigation which is done through suitable methods. They are later elaborated through continued data collection using the same, different or both the same

and different methods until no new and different data emerges. At this point data saturation has been achieved. LeCompte and Schensul (2010) refer to this process as recursive analysis.

The concept of culture is key in ethnographic research. Culture is described by LeCompte and Schensul (2010: 21) as consisting of persisting patterns of behaviour and beliefs amongst a group of people. It can be understood through observation of that group's behaviour and not just through what they say they do. However, LeCompte and Schensul (ibid) note that although culture has to do with shared patterns of meaning and behaviour by groups of people, it does not mean that everyone in that cultural group behaves the same way. In every group and in any domain of culture, substantial variations will exist. For example people's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours will vary depending on many factors such as racial identity, gender, status, age, and other factors considered relevant in the social rhetoric and composition of contemporary life. Therefore, even within a particular culture different voices need to be included in an ethnographic research. Because of my status within the research context as discussed in Chapter 1, the design was not only ethnographic as generally discussed above, but self-ethnographic.

The concept of self-ethnography is relatively new within the broader context of ethnographic research. As a result, there is limited literature that specifies the nature and characteristics of self-ethnography. Consequently, this review of the research design relied on the few sources that could be accessed about self-ethnography. In addition, reference was made to the general insiderness or "practitioner enquiry" (Greene 2014: 1) in qualitative research in a bid to provide clarity on the essence and characteristics of the chosen research design.

Self-ethnography can also be defined as "home-culture-ethnography or insider ethnography" because a researcher observes the home institution focusing on particular aspects of its culture (Alvesson 2003: 176; Alvesson 2009; Coghlan & Brannik 2014; Greene 2014). In self-ethnographic research, researchers turn themselves towards researching a group of individuals to which they themselves belong. As a result, a researcher has natural access to the cultural setting and information because of her/his active participation on more or less equal terms with other participants in that setting

(Alvesson 2003). As such, research is not what the researcher is mainly preoccupied with except when a particular empirical material is a target “for close scrutiny and writing” (Alvesson 2003: 174). The researcher is consequently more of an observing participant rather than a participant observer (as in the regular range of research described as ethnographic) because participation precedes a research-focused sense of observation.

Self-ethnography, according to Alvesson (ibid), should not be confused with autoethnography. Autoethnography, according to Schwandt (2007: 16) is “a particular form of writing that seeks to unite ethnographic (looking outward at a world beyond one’s own) and autobiographical (gazing inward for a story of one’s self) intentions”. It is somewhat unique in academic research, since its primary warrant is a quest for self-understanding (Anderson 2006). Starr (2010) explains that autoethnographic research requires self-exploration, introspection and interpretation that assist researchers to locate themselves within their own history and culture, thus allowing them to broaden their understanding of their own values in relation to others. Butler (2009) comments that autoethnography invites a personal, almost intimate dimension to research and requires the reader to ‘feel’ the research and to be actively engaged in the production of knowledge through responding to, critiquing and interpreting the autoethnographic data (Gwythera & Possamai-Inesedy 2009: 108). It is written in a confessional narrative style where a researcher writes from a personal point of view and then proceeds to the experiences of those being studied (Alvesson 2003: 176). On the other hand, self-ethnography can be written in any way such as providing detailed accounts of social events that the researcher observes even if the researcher was not directly engaged in those events. Characteristically, a self-ethnographic researcher does not struggle to enter and create rapport with participants in the setting as would be the case with other ethnographic research. Instead, the researcher struggles to “break out” from what is already known about the setting. The “break out” is needed in order to try and separate the researchers’ own experiences from those of co-workers who participate in the study and to collect and analyse data in an objective way. Unluer (2012: 1) highlights that one of the disadvantages of researching from the inside perspective is that of greater familiarity with the context which may lead to a loss of objectivity. She argues that, in such instances, a researcher may unconsciously make wrong assumptions about the research process because of the researcher’s prior knowledge, and this may

be a biased influence on the process. Because of these possibilities, a self-ethnographic researcher is therefore “a run-away” or escapee, while in other ethnographies researchers are “burglars” who try to break into the settings they are not familiar with (Alvesson 2003: 177). Eriksson (2010: 93) makes a clear distinction between ethnography, auto-ethnography and self-ethnography. He states:

*In ethnography, we turn ourselves as research instruments towards groups of people that are in some way external, foreign or alien. I might for example decide to study truck drivers. Since I have never been a truck driver myself, nor been socialising with them before, I need to break into this group of people, and to break into their practices. In self-ethnography, we turn ourselves towards a group of people where we already belong. I might for example decide to study other PhD students. Since I am a PhD student myself, I need to break out of this group of people and break out of their practices. In auto-ethnography, I turn myself towards myself and observe myself in a particular role, for example, in my role as 3-Dimensional graphics artist.*

Therefore, as much as all the types of research cited above are ethnographies, they differ according to the “metaphorical direction of movement” (Erikson 2010: 93).

The need to break out or to be a run-away researcher in a self-ethnographic research study was the experience I expected in the process of my research in the CEDU. However, I was also aware of Trowler’s (2011) suggestion that insiderness differs according to context and the researcher’s identity. Trowler argues that insiderness is not fixed because one may be researching aspects of the institution or people that one is not familiar with. Insiderness also depends on one’s own identity positioning within the institution (Trowler 2011: 2). This was true of my study because, although I know many academics in the CEDU, the college comprises ten different departments. Each department has its own operational dynamics. Furthermore, the colleagues in those departments hold different hierarchical positions to me and my contact and engagement with some of them was limited. Some individuals work from home while I am campus-based, which further makes my experience of a similar situation – that we are all

academics and are required to fulfil academic roles in the CEDU – different from theirs. Therefore I was a stranger in some cases since there was a significant difference in our situatedness and circumstances.

In addition to this blurred nature of my identity within the CEDU in relation to the research process, I was also 'semi-literate' with regard to the micro cultures of different departments. This situation was not unique because, according to Trowler (2011), researchers are rarely ever completely insiders or outsiders in any research context. This view is supported by Kerstetter (2012: 101) who posits that because a researcher is sometimes an insider and outsider at the same time, some researchers have moved past a strict insider/outsider dichotomy. They are emphasising "the space between" which depends on contextual factors in the research site and the status of a researcher at a particular context. An example of contextual factors in a research site is that given by Alvesson (2003) who suggests that universities are not homogeneous, but comprise colleges and departments that are multiple cultural configurations. He argues that it would be superficial to explore a university culture as if it was similar across colleges and departments. Therefore, it would also be superficial to assume that an academic researcher would be a complete insider or an outsider in a university context.

In addition, Kerstetter (2012: 101) argues that a researcher's identity is relative and may even change according to where and when research is conducted, the personalities of both the researcher and individual participants as well as the topic of the research. Even the invariable personal identities such as race and gender may become less significant depending on the research situation and that may affect or change the issue of insiderness/outsiderness.

The advantage in this study was that I work on the same campus with many of the research participants and therefore building rapport was not a problem. I had started building relationships and rapport with them before I even formally embarked on the study as collegiality is part of our mandate as academics. Relationship building is a foreseeable occurrence that happens naturally through day to day interactions in different forums within the institution. Also, I had a general idea of, for example, policies that regulate participants' practices and behaviour. For instance, I knew that it was/is a University requirement that all academics should be in their offices during working

hours. The only thing that I did not know about this requirement, for example, was how it was managed in different departments within the CEDU and how academics experienced it with regards to its impact on their academic identity construction. However, unlike in other ethnographic studies, rapport building with the research participants was not a major obstacle because they are my colleagues and many already knew me. Instead, getting an academic leave during my study helped me to form some form of distance between my participants and I and mainly come to campus as a researcher.

Because of its design, this study relied on sourcing information from information rich participants who could throw light on and answer the research questions in substantial detail. Below I present the steps I followed in seeking volunteers for my research.

#### **4.3.3 Sampling**

In order to develop a detailed study of an intended selection rather than the whole population of possible participants in a research project, it is necessary to choose a representative sample. Among the issues that need to be taken into consideration when selecting a research sample are; the target population, the sample size, the sampling strategies and the sample sourcing (Robinson 2014). These four items are discussed in this section in relation to how they were addressed in this study.

Robinson (2014: 25) refers to the study's target population as the sample universe. It is the total population of people from which participants may possibly be sampled for a research study. A researcher sets criteria for inclusion or exclusion or both exclusion and inclusion with a goal of finding a homogeneous sample (Robinson *ibid*; Babbie 2011). For this study the sample universe was comprised of the employees of UNISA who do academic work such as teaching, research, CE, postgraduate supervision and the related academic practices. For my target population, these employees had to be employed in the CEDU and not in the other colleges of the University. The target population included academics on post levels ranging from junior lecturers, lecturers, senior lecturers, associate professors and professors, irrespective of their positions or designations within the college or whether they were campus-based or worked from home.



Also, excluded from the target population were the non-academic staff members. The CEDU was selected because it is the college where I am placed as a lecturer in one of its ten departments. It would therefore be *convenient* for me to observe and be part of many practices and activities that take place in the CEDU, in accordance with the nature of a self-ethnographic research design. Therefore the research site was selected through convenience sampling.

The sampling strategy for participants was a combination of purposive and volunteer sampling. Purposive sampling is a form of nonprobability sampling which allows a researcher to identify specific individuals who are more likely to provide rich information that a researcher needs regarding the research question (Blankenship 2010). The sampling in this study was purposive to the extent that only academic staff members were requested to participate. However, Blankenship (ibid) warns that purposive sampling has a risk of being based on the researcher's judgement which may be flawed or biased. This possibility was controlled in this study through following volunteer sampling. After permission for the study had been obtained from the college research ethics committee and the university Senate Higher Degrees Research and Innovation Committee (SHDRIC), the Executive Dean of the College of Education and the Chairs of Departments (CODs) in the college, the process of sourcing participants began. In total eight CODs accepted the request for their departments to participate in the study. After each of the eight participating COD's positive response, an email was sent to all academics in their departments explaining the purpose of the study and asking them to volunteer their participation in the study.

Volunteer sampling is a type of convenience sampling (Blankenship ibid). However, it has particular disadvantages. Blankenship argues that there are no mechanisms to ensure that volunteers represent the population of the study. Also, he cautions that it happens that individuals who want to complain about the issue under research will generally volunteer to participate since they believe that participation will provide them with the opportunity to raise their objections and contentions. The responses of such participants could be said to be skewed to some extent. To mitigate these possible risks a questionnaire was attached in the email that was sent to academics requesting participation. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gain information on individuals

who volunteered to participate in the study (see Appendix 2). The intention of the questionnaire was to put me in the position where I would be able to select information rich individuals from the volunteers as well as to select individuals from the various categories of participants thereby ensuring that the sample was representative. Fortunately the volunteers included all the categories of academics as required by the study. The volunteers represented individuals who were professors, senior lecturers, lecturers, those who never shared offices, those who were sharing or once shared offices, professors who work from home and those who work on campus and academics whose offices had been relocated to off-campus locations. There were also volunteers from departmental and college level of management. In total twenty academics volunteered their participation in the study (refer to Chapter 1: 1.8.2).

The other mechanism of controlling my biases was to be observant of the responses to the research questions and to be open to find more participants should the responses be one sided. However, there was no need to add more participants because the responses were satisfactorily inclusive. In many of the issues that were discussed there were academics with differing opinions from which interpretations and conclusions could be drawn.

As discussed in Chapter 1: 1.8.2, there was no specific number of participants initially targeted for this study. A risk that was taken was to keep the number of participants open until all volunteers made themselves known. Fortunately, the number that volunteered was satisfactorily representational of the target population in terms of categories of volunteers and it was manageable in number. At the stage the study was initiated, there were 119 academic staff members in the college who thus made up the research population. Since only a sample of the population was required for the research the twenty academics who volunteered participation was deemed representative, especially because it included all the targeted categories.

In the following section the methods that were used to collect data are discussed.

#### 4.3.4 Data collection methods

Amongst the methods that ethnographers use in the field is to watch what happens; listen to what is said; ask questions informally and formally; collect documents and artefacts; and collect data towards addressing the research questions from all available sources (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 3). For this study multiple methods of data collection were used. These included document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and observation that comprised non-participant observation and observing participation. All these methods were supported by the coinciding taking of fieldnotes during the data collection processes. Before the formal data collection commenced, I followed Pink's (2009) advice and did a pre-fieldwork survey of literature, and also studied examples of how other ethnographers have worked through different ethnographic methods.

The actual data collection process took place over a period of twelve months – from June 2013 to May 2014 (see Chapter 1: 1.10). The process started with, firstly, analysing all available Institutional policies related to physical space, time management and academic freedom which were perceived to be a construct of academic identity formation. These documents were my source of data for the analysis of, mainly, the conceived dimension of space. I understood this analysis to be a good starting point from which I could draw ideas of what would constitute appropriate questions that would initiate meaningful discussions with research participants on all three dimensions of space. From the variety of policies in the Institution, many of which related to metaphorical space as understood and described in chapter 2, I was careful to use the key concepts of my study (such as space, academic, time, office, teaching, research, CE, freedom) to select the most relevant material. After accessing and reading the Institutional policies that are available to all staff at the Institution, I identified fifteen documents that related closely to my topic. These were the:

- Policy regarding the utilisation of building space (2005);
- Directive: professors working from home (2012);
- Policy on research professors (2012);
- Policy on grants from the research funds (2012);
- Policy on research ethics (2012);
- Policy on research and development leave for academic employees (2011);

- Policy on masters' and doctoral support for permanent UNISA employees (2013);
- Curriculum policy (2012);
- Policy: excellence in tuition award (2013);
- Open Distance Learning Policy (2008);
- Community engagement and outreach policy (2013);
- Conditions of employment (2007);
- Tuition policy (2012);
- Policy on official working hours (2013);
- Policy for the IPMS (2008).

I studied these policies before going to the field, but I found myself going back and forth to them during and even after the process of data collection due to the issues that were raised by participants at the time I was conducting the fieldwork. In addition to the policies, I also accessed and analysed email communications that related to the research topic that were circulated in the participating departments and to which I had been given access by the CODs. Generally, I also received these emails in my personal capacity since I am a member of one of the academic departments in the college. I also received emails from the Institutional intranet and I analysed those that related to the research topic.

The second method of data collection was the comprehensive observation of participating academics' working environments, namely their offices and meeting rooms, as well as the administrative office spaces which form part of the academic environment (Appendix 3). In doing this, I experienced the challenge mentioned by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:4) where a researcher struggles to decide where the observation begins within the research setting, which actors to follow first and which ones are to be shadowed at all. However, the aim of observations was twofold. First I wanted to record situations related to academic work and space as they happen *in situ* as well as the meanings of the events at the time for research participants. The second aim for observation was to record or document the material artifacts in the physical space, the changes that academics made to their space; seating arrangements and the arrangements of objects – both work related or otherwise; movement through the space and daily activities that academics undertook in their physical space. The observations

were mainly carried out concurrently with conducting the interviews except for instances where observations were done during the departmental meetings to identify interactions and the nature, construction and exercising of power relations in the meetings. The observations involved taking down field notes on the issues mentioned above as well as photographing the research participants' working environments, and the administrative office space.

The third method of data collection was through conducting semi-structured interviews with participating academics (Appendix 4). The purpose of these interviews was to explore and examine their perspectives of the influence of different dimensions of space in academic identity construction. As indicated above, these interviews and observations occurred concurrently where possible. In total, 20 semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with academics of different post levels in the departments (details in Chapter 1). Of these 20 participants, some were professors working from home. Of the four professors working from home one agreed to be interviewed at home and the space from which this professor works was observed. Three were interviewed either in my office or in the campus cafeteria and consequently I was not able to do any research related observations in these cases. This was deemed to be inconsequential because, according to Pink (2009: 9), in some circumstances contemporary ethnographic research may not follow the prescriptions set out for classic ethnographies. She argues:

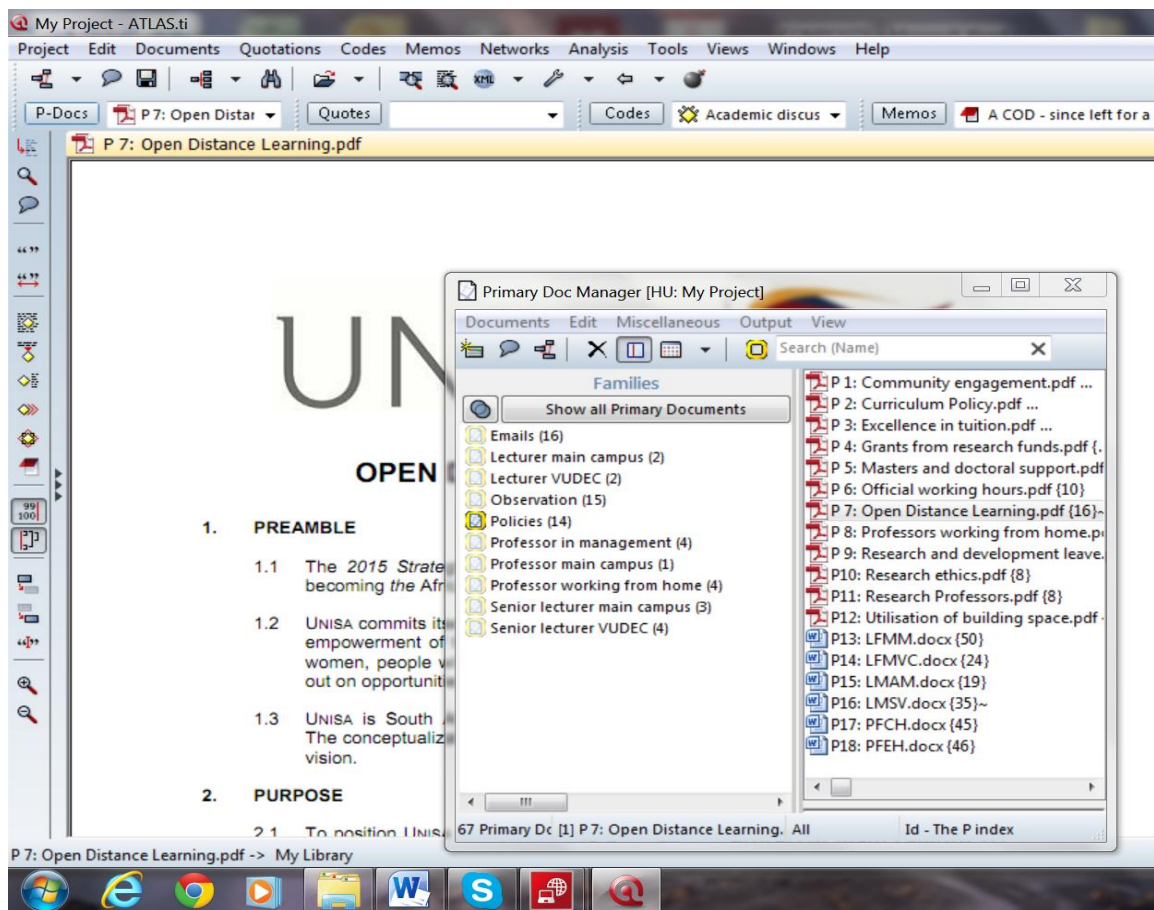
*...while classic observational methods certainly produce valuable in-depth and often detailed description of other people's lives, this type of fieldwork is often not viable in contemporary contexts. This might be because the research is focused in environments where it would be impractical and inappropriate for researchers to go and live for long periods with research participants, for instance, in a modern home...or in a workplace to which the researcher has limited access...*

Therefore the fact that these academics were/are part of the departments on campus made interviews with them sufficient to augment observations that were possible on campus. Interviews with them were also triangulated with policies that were analysed

as part of the research data. In the following section a discussion of the manner in which data was analysed is presented.

#### **4.3.5 Data Analysis**

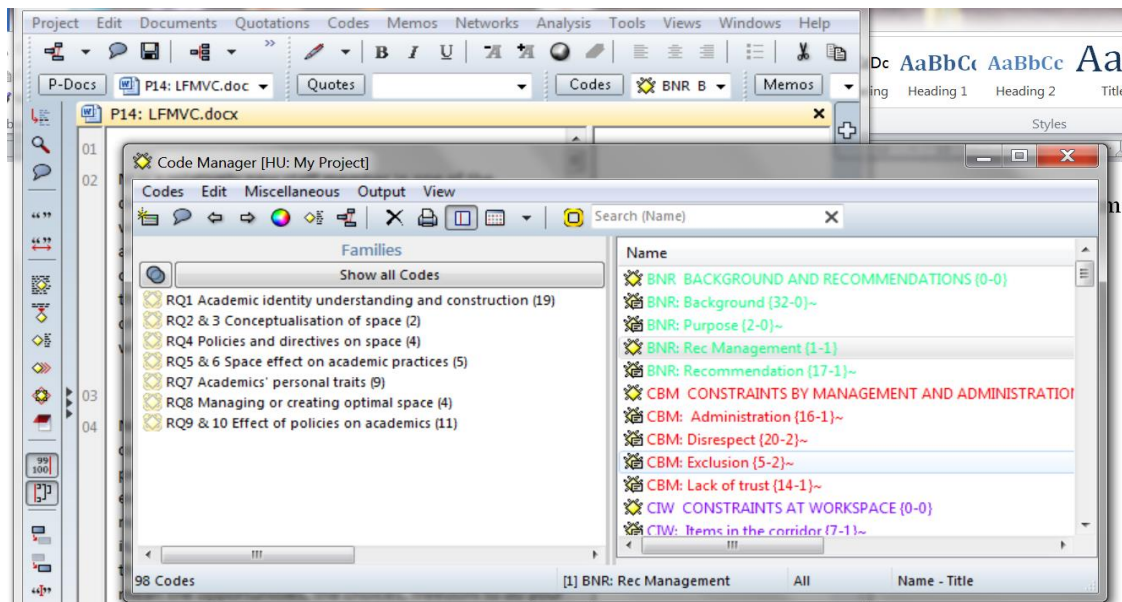
I used Atlas.ti (version 7), a Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) programme, as a tool to support the process of data analysis. I started by electronically uploading documents containing data on the Atlas.ti project file, the hermeneutic unit (HU) (Frieze 2014). These data included the policies, the emails, the interview transcripts and observation notes and pictures. All these materials became primary documents (P-Docs). The next step was to group the P-Docs into document families for the purpose of organising data and making it manageable. Initially two document families, one with policies and emails, and the other with interview transcripts, observation notes and photographs were created. Later I realised that the 36 documents in the family with interviews could be grouped into different categories of participants. The observation and the emails P-Docs were then also put into separate document families. Therefore, instead of having one document family with 36 documents (which included observation and interview transcripts) nine document families were created in addition to the one for policies, which made a total of ten document families with a manageable number of documents in each (Fig 4.1).



**Fig 4.1: P-Docs in families**

Ten families are visible to the left of Figure 4.1, starting with “Emails”, with a number of documents in each family put in brackets. To the right is a list of all documents in the HU. In order to work closer with only documents in one of the families, I would set a global filter on that particular family as shown in Figure 4.2. In Figure 4.2 only the fifteen documents in the family “Policies” are visible. This way it would be easy to focus analysis attention only on the filtered documents at a time.

Then I started re-reading all the documents to note the aspects that related to my research objectives and developed codes. This coding was done until no new codes could be identified from data, a process referred to as saturation (Friesen 2014). Initially three hundred and twelve (312) codes were developed. Comments or definition of codes was part of the process of coding to help me remember what each code meant when it was created.

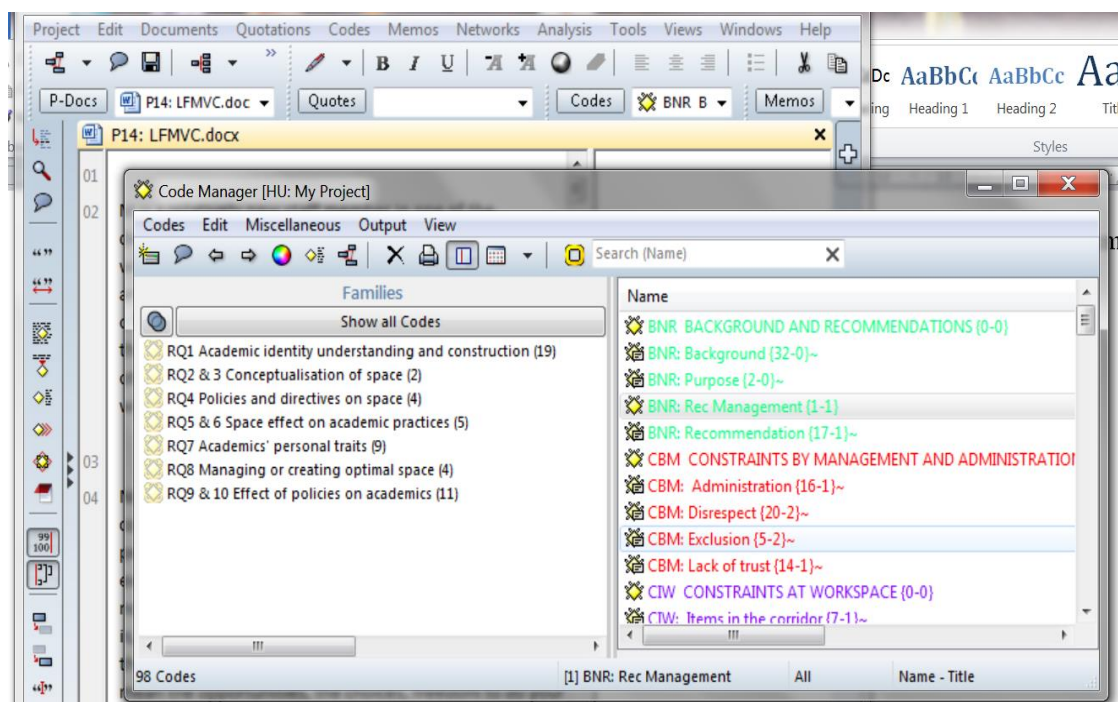


**Fig. 4.2: Global filter for the document: Policies**

A further look at the 312 codes led to the identification of codes that had different names but similar or closely related meanings. These codes were re-read against the quotations from which they were developed and were merged accordingly based on their similarities to avoid repetitions or overlapping (Frieze 2014). Such merging was also done to decrease the number of codes to work with, again for data management purposes. Codes that seemed not to have a clear meaning on their own were either renamed or merged with other codes (Frieze 2014). This process was done until 98 codes remained.

The next step was to develop categories from the list of codes. I followed Frieze's suggestion to use capital letters to name the main category, preceded by abbreviations that would then precede all codes in that category. For easy identification of each category, each was given a distinctive colour (Fig 4.3).

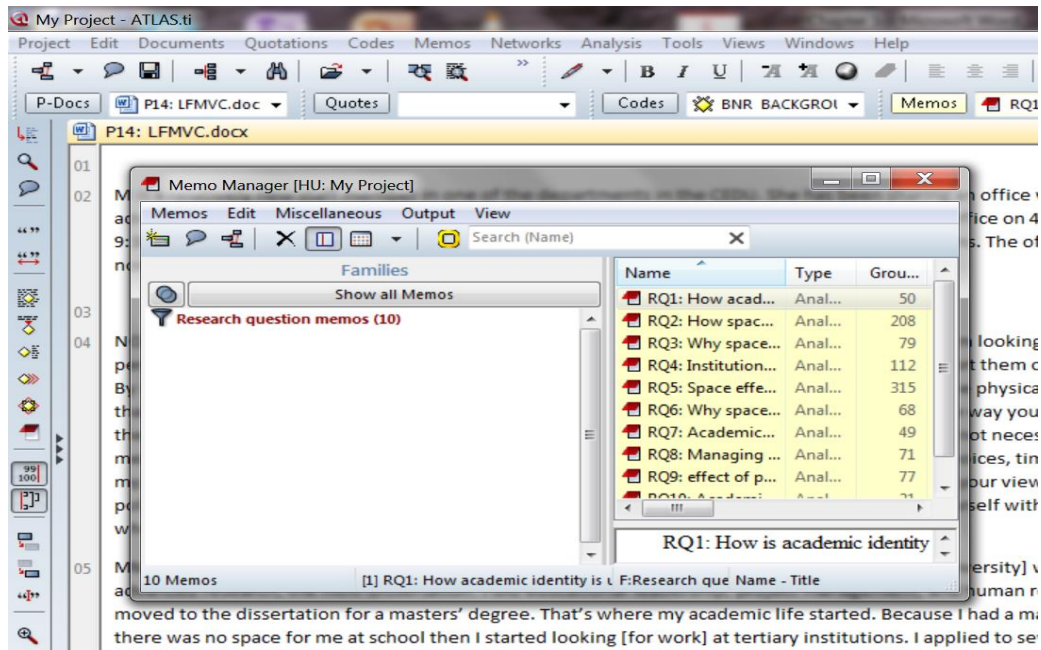




**Fig 4.3 Code categories**

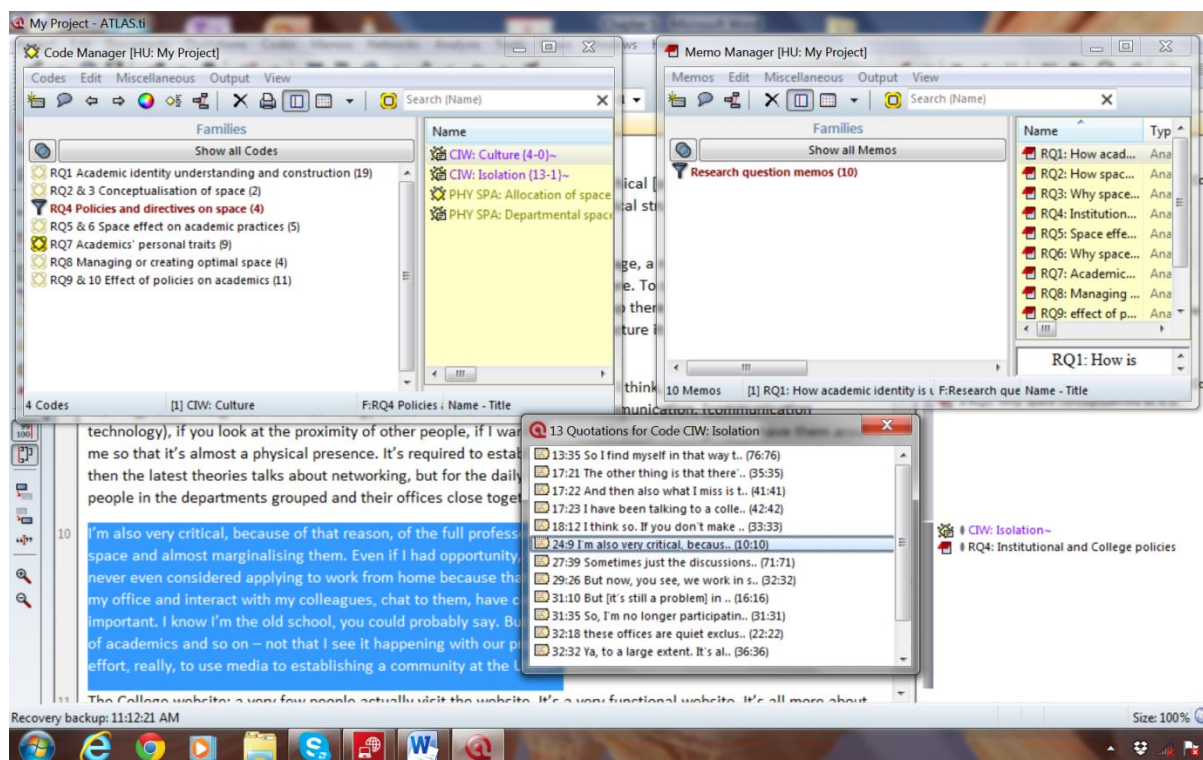
Figure 4.3 is actually an example of the third stage of coding in which codes were categorised. Appendix 1 shows one of the stages where categories were created but in which there were still many related codes that could be merged.

The next step was to create research question (RQ) memos, the level of analysis that Friese (2014: 168) refers to as conceptual level, which is deemed higher than the descriptive level of developing codes. I created a family of all the RQ memos so that I could be able to filter and work only with them.



**Fig 4.4 RQ memo family filtered**

In Figure 4.4 the filtered RQ memos are visible to the right. The next step of analysis was to open the code manager together with the memo manager to display codes and RQ memos simultaneously. I would double click on the code to display the quotations. A click on a quotation would display a document from which it was derived with the quotation highlighted. Then I would drag and drop the RQ memo that contains a question addressed by the highlighted text on the highlighted text (Fig 4.5). From this stage I was able to identify the links between two or more codes in relation to the highlighted quotations. Such identification of links led to the development of networks of related codes and related quotations.



**Fig 4.5 Filtered Codes, Filtered RQ Memos, Quotations highlighted**

## 4.4 RIGOUR IN THE STUDY

Rigour in qualitative research is addressed through a consideration of strategies for establishing transferability, confirmability, credibility and dependability should be followed (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Shenton 2004; Loh 2013). These concepts are discussed in this section in relation to how they applied in the present study.

### 4.4.1 Transferability

Transferability is about the extent at which the findings of a particular research project may be applied to other situations. Since such applicability is difficult to ensure in qualitative research where findings only refer to a specific context, a researcher needs to provide “sufficient contextual information about the fieldwork site” so that the reader may be able to make such a transfer (Shenton 2004: 69). In other words, a researcher needs to provide a thick description of the context in which the qualitative research was conducted as well as that of the phenomenon being investigated (Lincoln & Guba 1985;

Loh 2013). It is from such thick descriptions that readers may decide whether or not the findings and conclusions of a particular research can be transferred to other contexts.

In this study the context of the study was described in Chapter 1 and throughout the chapters that follow. In addition, the inclusion and exclusion criteria as well as the number of participants that were involved in the study were described in section 4.3 of this chapter. The data collection methods, the duration of research as well as the research design were also discussed in detail. The intention of this research was not to provide generalizable findings and conclusions, since the findings were to be understood within the context in which this study was conducted.

#### **4.4.2 Confirmability**

Confirmability is about the manner in which a researcher ensures objectivity in a research project. Shenton (2004: 72) suggests that confirmability can be ensured through presentation of findings that show, as far as possible, “the results of the experiences and ideas of the informants rather than the characteristics and preferences of the research.” Amongst the ways of ensuring confirmability are triangulation; declaration of the researcher’s assumptions and possible biases; declaration of the world views that affect the choice of methods; as well as the step by step description of the research processes.

In this study confirmability was addressed through the presentation of, as far as possible, the verbatim expressions of participants’ opinions about issues in discussion. These opinions were also interpreted in consideration of the content of the reviewed policies as well as observations made in the field where possible. All processes that were followed in deciding, executing and presenting data were explained in detail.

#### **4.4.3 Credibility**

Credibility is one of the concepts of concern in the rigour of qualitative research. It is about ensuring the extent at which the phenomenon that was investigated was accurately recorded (Shenton 2004). Loh (2013: 5; cf. Lincoln & Guba 1985) mention techniques for ensuring credibility as including: prolonged engagement with

participants; persistent observation; triangulation, peer debriefing and member checking amongst others. The advantage in the case of this study was that it was conducted at a site where I work. Prolonged engagement with participants and persistent observation were thus automatic. There was a frequent debriefing with my supervisor which brought and enhanced ideas regarding the research. There was limited formal peer debriefing with participants, but quite a lot of informal debriefing with colleagues as I met and talked with them about my study. One such encounter was when one of the professors in management who was participating in the study came to my office and enquired how my research was progressing. We had a discussion of almost 30 minutes that provided unique insight into the research. Also, transcripts were returned to the participants for them to check whether their interview responses had been accurately captured. Some added valuable feedback. The findings were also sent to the participants for comment prior to their analysis in the hope of getting feedback and additional perspectives.

Greene (2014: 4) cautions that invariably insider research is blamed for being biased because the researcher is too close to the culture being studied to be able to question or view it objectively (cf. Erikson 2010). Greene (ibid) argues that even the selection of the topic and participants signals possible personal interests and bias, that is, “personal beliefs, experiences, and values.” The frequent engagement with participants and triangulation as indicated above were helpful in addressing such possible biases in this study. Moreover, all academics who volunteered to participate were included without bias. Although it was possible that only academics that were dissatisfied with space allocation, or those that were close to me in one way or another, would volunteer to participate in the study, I was satisfied with the fact that they were of different ranks, and therefore possibly had different experiences regarding space.

#### **4.4.4 Dependability**

Shenton (2004) suggests that dependability may, like credibility, be ensured through a detailed description of the research design and research process. This description should include evaluation and reflection on the effectiveness of the research process undertaken. In this study a thick description of the main concept, space, and the research methodology was presented. In addition, section 4.6 below is a reflection on the limitations and other encounters that affected the research process.

## **4.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

It is a general requirement that research that involves people must ensure that participants are not harmed in any way. The identity of individuals must at all times be protected and this is achieved through compliance with confidentiality and anonymity as well as the obtaining of informed consent for participation in the research from the participants (Floyd & Arthur 2012). Like many, if not all, institutions, UNISA has an ethics protocol that research projects have to go through before they may commence. The researcher is obliged to seek ethical clearance from the college and the university Research Ethics Committees prior to embarking on the research as it is only after such clearance has been granted that a project may commence. In this study that obligation was met (see Chapter 1: 1.8.5). Only once ethical clearance had been obtained at the College and the Institutional level, were emails sent to the CoDs requesting permission to conduct research in their departments. After the individual CODs had granted permission, an email was sent to all academics in the participating departments requesting them to volunteer their participation in the study (see also section 4.3.3 above). Research only commenced once agreement to participate in the study had been obtained from these individuals. All participants were assured of confidentiality, and anonymity, and their voluntary participation was sought and confirmed in writing prior to the research being undertaken. As part of the voluntary participation clause, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study without penalty at any stage should they so wish. All participants signed the informed consent documents.

However, in self-ethnographic and other forms of insider research considerations about ethical issues extend beyond the general confidentiality and anonymity issues associated with research. A self-ethnographic researcher needs to take precautions against the risk that participants in insider research may recognize each other and that other people in the institution may be able to deduce who the participants were (Floyd & Arthur 2012; Tolich 2004). In the research undertaken, this meant that both the departmental and personal anonymity needed to be ensured. Consequently, in this study participants were referred to as participant, professors, senior lecturer, lecturer, COD and manager. However, Trowler (2011) raises other cautions about this process, namely that hiding some information as above may have limited value when readers of the report are familiar with the researcher and the researcher's position in the institution.

Also, if the researcher hides that information about herself it “breaks the important principle of transparency in methodology (so that the reader can assess its robustness) and transparency about and reflection on yourself and your position as a researcher...” (Trowler 2011: 3). To address this issue therefore, when applying for research access I indicated this dilemma but assured the participants that their names and the names of the departments would not be mentioned and that only the College and the Institution would be named. Then I followed Trowler’s (ibid) suggestion as follows:

*...offering respondents sight of drafts of all research outputs so that they can assess whether their identity and role are sufficiently obscured; asking an independent reader to assess your reports for “traceability”, and guaranteeing this measure to your HEI and respondents; changing detail of publications relating to the organisation and informing the reader of this. Transparency in your approach to this is important.*

For this I relied on my research assistants and my supervisor who constantly read my work critically. Participants were also offered the opportunity to read the findings and make comments before they were sent for professional editing.

However, insider researchers encounter other ethical issues that have to be dealt with in the field (Floyd & Arthur 2012: 3). Such issues are “linked to on-going personal and professional relationships with participants, insider knowledge, conflicting professional and researcher roles and anonymity” (Floyd & Arthur ibid). This situation gets even more complicated when a researcher is a student in the institution where the researcher is employed because in that case both the researcher and the supervisor are insiders (Floyd & Arthur ibid). As a result, insider research ethics are not as a linear process but is messy and nonlinear (Lichtman 2010). The section below should be viewed as a continuation of the discussion on ethical issues although it includes insight on limitations of the study and other reflections in the process of the study.

## **4.6 REFLECTIONS ON THE PROCESS OF THE STUDY**

The discussion in this section looks on the limitation and advantages regarding access to research participants in this self-ethnographic research. The discussion includes the reflection on my complicated identity as a researcher, a lecturer and a colleague to the participants.

### **4.6.1 Accessing participants**

The question of access for a self-ethnographic research has been discussed in section 4.3.2.1. Much of the literature in that section indicates the ease of accessing the research site and the possession of internal information. This is cited as advantages for a self-ethnographic researcher. However, some researchers also mention some challenges insider researchers face with regard to access to information (Floyd & Arthur 2012; Greene 2014; Lichtman 2010). For example, Greene (2014: 6) highlights two possible problems that an insider researcher may experience about gaining access to information. First, a researcher may be regarded as “too much of an insider” to the extent that people may not feel comfortable participating in the research. Second, the researcher may be regarded as too distanced from the target group to be trusted with information. As an insider in my college I did not experience the first problem mentioned by Greene. However, my experiences were close to the second problem, that of being too distanced, but in a rather different way. These experiences are discussed below.

### **4.6.2 Power from unexpected sources**

Power in the research field is expected from those people in authority, the gatekeepers, such as institutional managers, the heads of departments and research directors (Crowhurst & Kennedy-Macfoy’s 2013). Even literature and policies construct gatekeepers for academic research as people in positions of power in bureaucracies – people who hold authority to grant permission for research to be pursued (Heller, et. al. 2011). However, power is not always hierarchical. I encountered a different source of power during the process of my research.

There were situations where the COD would allow me full access to the department, but when I approached the COD’s personal assistant, the assistant would not provide me



with the required information such as the dates and times for departmental meetings and emails circulating to and from the departments. The problem was assumed to be either due to communication problems between the COD and the personal assistant or due to my identity as a researcher which for some reason was perceived negatively. In any case, this problem made me realise that “power comes everywhere; it is exercised from innumerable points” (McLaren 2002: 37). It also confirmed what Lichtman (2010) says about the ethical clearance process for insider research being not linear but messy. It became clear that access to departmental information was not solely in the hands of the departmental heads in this case but that the personal assistants to the heads of department were also in a position of power. From literature that was accessed for this study this point of power regarding access to information in the research field is not mentioned. It can also be seen as related to the identity of the researcher as discussed below.

#### **4.6.3 Researcher’s complex identity**

When conducting a self-ethnographic study a researcher may not expect problems with power relations because she/he would be working with people they know – as an insider. But, Trowler (2011) argues that what counts as inside depends also on a researcher’s own identity positioning. This was my dilemma – that when I was conducting my research in the CEDU I had a complex identity. I was simultaneously a doctoral student, a lecturer and a colleague. All these identities became an issue in point and depended on who I was talking to at a particular time or what I needed from the person concerned. This complexity of my identity impacted on my insiderness in this case and revealed power that was hidden in unexpected places, such as power in some CODs’ assistants. Therefore, my experience in the field was that it is not always that a self-ethnographic researcher is a ‘runaway’ from the taken-for-grantedness as suggested by Alvesson (2003: 177). Also, my experience with unexpected power revealed a limitation regarding exclusions in the research sample.

#### **4.6.4 Exclusions and gatekeeping as a challenge**

It is argued that clear exclusion and inclusion criteria in a research sample strengthen the homogeneity of the sample (Robinson 2014). While this is true and advantageous for rigour in research, it can also be a disadvantage. For example, the challenge with the personal assistants made me realize that it was a limitation for my study that I excluded the CODs' assistants in the research sample because I would have been able to examine the reasons for this lack of co-operation from some had they been research participants. However, although I was tempted to ask them and to include their responses in this report, the purpose of the study did not allow for their inclusion. Moreover, ethical clearance that was given for the research had not included the CODs' assistants. Therefore it would have been unethical to include them at that stage.

The challenge, as indicated, also confirmed Trowler's (2013) argument that insiderness is relative, in the sense that even if the CODs would regard me as an insider, the assumption I made from my experiences with some of their assistants was that those assistants did not necessarily regard me as such. I found this experience interesting because ethics policies and social research literature construct gatekeepers as if they were static figures that you go past once and then move forward with the research. However, that possibly works better in "external ethical engagement" (Floyd & Arthur 2012: 5), that is, where a researcher is not an insider. For a self-ethnographic researcher, especially, one who has to spend time with different categories of participants and go through different gatekeepers, the process is not that linear. What became evident was the confirmation of Crowhurst and Kennedy-Macfoy's (2013) argument that gaining access to research populations, knowing who the gatekeepers are and what role they play remains under-theorised in social research literature. There is a persistent gap between "gatekeepers 'in the books' and gatekeepers 'in action'" (Crowhurst & Kennedy-Macfoy 2013: 457). Even with the gatekeepers mentioned in the literature, my experience was that the process of accessing information is not unidirectional. There are issues that emerged during the research process which demanded that I went back to the gatekeepers now and again. For example, when I could not get the information I needed from the assistant, I would have to go back to the COD. My experience indicated a need to problematize this oversimplified approach to

gatekeeping which I assumed it may be a general problem experienced by researchers which has not received attention in literature.

Like any other gatekeeper, the formal gatekeepers' assistants can be helpful facilitators who provide access to and increase acceptance among research participants or they can be obstacles/stumbling blocks. I experienced both these cases in the field. The CODs' assistants in some departments were highly cooperative and supportive in every possible respect. Whenever I went to them asking to see the COD, they would immediately set appointments for me. If the CODs asked them to provide me with particular documents, they did that immediately. They saw to it that I received every kind of information I needed and they showed no reason to mistrust me as a researcher in their departments. However, the opposite was also experienced from some of the other assistants which complicated the research.

#### **4.6.5 The ODL institutional culture**

As indicated earlier UNISA's ODL character allows professors to work from home. One of the limitations I encountered during this study was the limited access to the professors working from home. As indicated earlier, professors working from home could not all be visited in their homes and therefore could not be observed while in action. Although the professors working from home participated in the study, they were uncomfortable with a visit to their homes as a researcher (cf. Greene 2014). However, I regarded this limitation as a strong indicator of the contextual nature of self-ethnography, that there is no standard way of conducting it (Pink 2009). Instead, this limitation helped me to experience directly some of the professors' challenges with regard to not having offices on campus (see discussions in chapter 6).

#### **4.6.6 Observations in the presence of non-participants**

After following all the steps indicated in the UNISA Research Ethics Policy about doing research at UNISA, I decided to request participating departments to link me as their member of staff for the duration of my formal study. I wanted to be part of all formal and possibly informal conversations that took place in the departments in relation to issues that were salient to my study. I needed to observe what the departments communicate

about on a daily basis and how such communications enabled or constrained academics' spaces towards developing their academic identities. I wanted to observe the proceedings of the departmental meetings to see how participating academics got opportunities and time to contribute to discussions and/or debates that affected their teaching, research and related practices. I wanted to observe how the physical space that is used during such meetings enabled or constrained the required responses or interaction during the meetings.

Much is written about the roles a researcher can assume in the field in order to gather the necessary information. Barker (2006: 174) lists seven participation roles: nonparticipation; complete observer; observer-as-participant; moderate or peripheral membership; participant-as-observer, active participation, active membership; complete participation and complete membership. Each of these has advantages and disadvantages mentioned in literature. However, no literature sources could be accessed for this study that discusses a case where observation is conducted in the presence of people who have volunteered and consented to participate and the general members of the community who are not necessarily participating in the study. This was a situation I encountered when visiting departmental meetings during the process of my research. In this case I relied on the cooperation of the CODs who would inform the departmental members beforehand that I was a researcher in their department and I was going to be part of their meetings. My insiderness was an advantage in this case because all departmental members knew me and my presence at the meetings did not seem to concern them.

In some cases, however, I realized when I was already in the departmental meetings, that the COD had not informed staff members about my research and non-participating members of these departments were not aware of the reason for my presence in the meeting. It was only then that the COD would inform them of my role and the reason for my presence. That situation led to a misunderstanding in one instance, where one staff member asked for informed consent forms to be given to all members in the meeting, including those that were not participating in the study. The tension was eased after I was given time to explain how I was going to do the observations and my awareness of ethical considerations. Even in that situation I sensed that my identity as a colleague helped in creating space for understanding.

## **4.7 CLOSING COMMENTS**

In this chapter the research methodology that was followed in the process of this study was presented. This included a discussion on the nature and characteristics of a self-ethnographic research design, qualitative research and various data collection strategies that included an explanation of how semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observations as methods were carried out. It was also explained that the data were triangulated to strengthen the quality and rigour of the study. A detailed process of improving rigor was also presented, as well as that of adhering to necessary ethical considerations. Reflection on the experiences encountered in the field and on the limitations of the research design was also presented. In the next chapter data from the research process are presented.

## CHAPTER 5

### UNDERSTANDING AND CONSTRUCTING ACADEMIC IDENTITIES IN THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

As explored in Chapters 1, 2 and 3, the understanding and definition of academic identities in a HE context involves a number of aspects. Those aspects relate to Kamper's (2012, see Chapter 1: 1.8.3) summary of what academic identity entails: that it is about what academics do; what they should do; what they can do and what they want to do. This chapter marks the beginning of an analysis of the contextual understandings, constructions and conceptualisations of academic identities in the CEDU at UNISA and the effect of space in the development of those identities. The chapter focuses on the analysis of how academic identity is defined and constructed in the CEDU. This focus was one of the subsidiary questions of this study which examined the manner in which space enables and constrains academic identity construction in the CEDU. It would not be possible to understand the manner in which space enables or constrains the development of academic identities unless one first establishes how the concept of academic identity is understood and constructed by academics in the CEDU at UNISA.

The question, "How academic identity is understood and constructed in the CEDU" could be investigated by asking, "How do academics and policy define what it means to be 'an academic'?" "What makes an academic different from other employees of the CEDU at UNISA?" and "How do academics construct their identities in the CEDU?" Finding answers to these questions included the analysis of policy and the conducting of face-to-face interviews with participants. This chapter presents findings from those processes and it is composed of eight sections, including this introduction, as follows:

- The roles and activities which both policy and participants describe as defining the identity of an academic generally and specifically in the CEDU;
- The role of academic background and academics' own initiatives in the development of academic identities;

- Expectations of the Institution and the participants regarding what being an academic entails. The expectations discussed include academic qualifications, support and the recognition of the status of an academic;
- Mentorship and guidance as significant activities in the development of academic identities;
- Perspectives concerning subjects or disciplines of specialisation as aspects in the development of academic identities;
- The effect of being a manager while developing an academic identity;
- The concluding comments.

## **5.2 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES DEFINING AN ACADEMIC**

One of the ways to define the concept “academic” is defining it according to the roles that are dedicated to staff in a HEI. Policies that provide a direct definition of an academic were identified and reviewed in this study. These were Policy for the IPMS where roles and responsibilities of academics of various academic levels are stipulated in their Performance Agreements, Policy on Research and Development leave, Policy on Research Professors, and the CE and Outreach policy. Based on an analysis of the IPMS Performance Agreements for academics, it was clear that their roles include teaching and learning, research, CE, postgraduate supervision, academic citizenship, academic leadership and administration. These are the roles on which the performance of academics is graded in the institution in consideration of their academic levels.

In the Policy on Research and Development leave (2011: 2) an academic employee is defined as “any person appointed to teach or to do research at a public HEI and any other employee designated as such by the Council of the institution.” Research and teaching are highlighted in this clause as the activities that an academic does at the Institution. In addition to teaching and research, CE is also dedicated to the expertise of academic staff at UNISA. This dedication is evident in the CE and outreach policy (2013) where CE is described as a way of contributing to the national transformation of HE through the use of UNISA’s teaching and research expertise to address community development needs and priorities. The CE policy also indicates that, although closely related to CE, community outreach is not dedicated solely to academic employees. The CE and outreach policy (2013: 3) states, “Community outreach refers to the voluntary

outreach to communities by academics, and other University employees, alumni or students in response to the social, economic and political needs of communities.” This statement suggests that the role of community outreach is only part of those roles defining an academic; engaging in community outreach does not necessarily define one as an academic employee. Other employees of the University may also engage in community outreach.

Participants in this study had the same understanding that the identity of an academic is defined by the roles as presented in the policies above. Some even elaborated on these roles as in the following example:

*An academic is somebody who will do some kind of scholarly work [...] writing papers for publications; writing on academic topics and in newspapers; attending conferences – somebody who’s also doing the real CE project and not thumb sucking the CE project but prepares and makes sure that [the] community is really benefitting, while at the same time his own research also benefits out of that CE project for instance (P25: PMVMC.docx – 25:7).*

Notable from this statement is that the roles mentioned in policy are less effective in defining an academic if they are not complemented by visible output in the forms of knowledge dissemination and beneficial CE. However, while there was agreement between policy and participants regarding these roles and activities, it became clear from the interviews that UNISA’s transformation from a dedicated teaching Institution to one in which research was signified as of primary importance has had an effect on the construction of academic identities in the CEDU. The following section looks at the views regarding this change.

### **5.2.1 Research and teaching as contending roles in academe**

The tendency noted during this research is that certain roles take precedence over others. No policy could be accessed that explicates the prioritisation of one role over another at UNISA. Instead, the prioritisation of one role over others is implied, and in the UNISA situation, this role is research which appears to have precedence over



teaching. These implications are evident in regulations and verbal statements made in the Institution and the CEDU. For example, in the CEDU board meeting of the 11<sup>th</sup> February 2014, a senior college manager encouraged academics to do research and publish their findings in journals because “emphasis in the Institution is on research.” (**College Board meeting, 11/02/2014**). This tendency to emphasise research seems to embody a demarcation between research-passionate and tuition-passionate academics (see also Chapter 1: 1.4) and is regarded by some academics as a constraint towards academic identity development as they understand it. For example, one particular interviewee argued that the HE fraternity “pressurises” academics towards research output at the expense of tuition and student support. In the case of the CEDU, tuition-passionate academics strive to develop their identities in terms of being exceptional teachers and not necessarily as pre-eminent researchers. One lecturer participant complained:

*I’m saying, ‘What is my purpose? I was employed as a lecturer. I know I need to do research, but what about my teaching which I’m passionate about?’ I think I’m more [interested in] student support because I don’t separate support from teaching. I think we’re missing a point here. We emphasise research, but we have students who are struggling with their studies and everything. I feel excited when I do student support within the academia, and that should not be [marginalised] (P13: LFMM.docx - 13:37).*

Emphasis on research is viewed as disregarding the passion that certain university staff have for tuition and student support. The participant regards these roles as the purpose and the essence of being an academic. His position on the research-teaching demarcation is “*Let teachers be teachers and researchers be researchers.*” In other words, the opinion is that teachers are different from researchers and the two embody distinctive identities. That clear demarcation was also suggested by another tuition-passionate participant (**P18: PFEH.docx - 18:23**) who stated that the CEDU’s academics’ primary task is to teach and not to do research.

The changeover in which research is prioritized is not unique to UNISA or the South African context (see Chapter 1: 1.2). However, if one considers the history of UNISA

(see Chapter 1: 1.3), the prevailing emphasis on research is a major change in the operations of the Institution that was previously dedicated to tuition. In addition, there was also a perception that the pressure to produce research outputs at UNISA is not primarily geared towards academic identity formation, but the generation of revenue for the Institution, as one particular interviewee argued. For example, one professor commented:

*...It is so morally wrong to me that UNISA, for instance, outsources<sup>3</sup> the teaching just because teaching is not where the money lies. They want to pressurise everybody to publish because that's where the subsidy comes from (P20: PFPH.docx - 20:21).*

For some academics outsourcing teaching would be seen as a positive consideration by the Institution since this would free additional time for research and publication. However, for some it is a concern as is the case with the participant above. The interviewee also maintained that previously tuition had been valued by the Institution and academics had been confident about and assured of their contribution to academe by virtue of their teaching. Referring to how academics used to value teaching before the Institutional changeover, the professor narrated:

*...we had to go at least once a year for discussion classes [with students] and when I joined [the Institution] it was twice a year that we travelled to the main centres and it was so satisfying, you know. Even though [we didn't] meet everybody, it was more fruitful because then you could judge what biggest problems [students] faced and it was kind of a motivating exercise (P20: PFPH.docx - 20:21).*

In addition to the concern about decreased emphasis on teaching in the Institution's ODL mode, there are also concerns about the curtailed opportunity to listen to, identify and possibly address students' learning problems during discussion classes.

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<sup>3</sup> Contract markers and contract tutors are appointed by the Institution to relieve academics of disproportionate pressure on teaching due to excessive numbers of students and to afford them additional time for research.

Apparently, the discussion classes were a motivating and fulfilling exercise for academics and their identities were developed through their engagement in the discussion classes.

While tuition-passionate academics were concerned about the Institution's emphasis on research at the cost of tuition, the research-passionate academics had a rather different perspective on the issue of academic role delineation. For example, one senior lecturer posited:

*I must honestly tell you that I don't really like this teaching, especially with this UNISA context, where you don't meet students. [...] my aim right now is to see myself as a research professor, because I just want to do research and forget about teaching... (P27: SLFMVL.docx – 27:3).*

While the participant has a clear preference for research, the problem even in this case is mainly about the lack of the opportunity to meet students. The participant continued to say:

*Otherwise I do like teaching. I am a teacher, but this Tutorial Letter<sup>4</sup> thing and all these emails and administration; I really hate it. To me it does not sound like teaching. It sounds more like admin. So, maybe I should not even use the term teaching... (P27: SLFMVL.docx - 27:12).*

Teaching in the Institution is mainly done through tutorial letters (TLs). It can therefore be said that although participants know and appreciate that UNISA is an ODL Institution, they still prefer to have contact with students. The elimination of discussion classes seems to be viewed as a closure of metaphorical space in which they could develop themselves according to their passion. The assumption deduced from some participants

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<sup>4</sup> Tutorial letters are documents that contain module content, assessment and assessment guidelines for students.

was that contact sessions were stopped because of the Institutional emphasis on research which generates more money for the Institution than tuition.

While some participants complained about the ODL mode of teaching in which they do not meet students, one professor indicated that the possibility of being innovative in ODL teaching, thereby developing a rich ODL academic teaching identity. He was asked whether tuition was of greater consequence in his development as an academic than other academic practices. His response suggested that, prior to the Institutional changes and prominence of research, his academic identity was substantially developed through pursuing his passion for teaching practices associated with the ODL mode of teaching:

*Then as time went by, I realised or my impression was that the University was becoming less concerned about tuition because I saw that, for example, we put a tremendous amount of work into satellite broadcasts and we got excellent feedback about the way satellite broadcasts helped students...The fact is I think I'm a good teacher and I think I got my message across well and I got a good report from my students. We went out of our way with the satellite broadcasts... (P17: PFCH.docx - 17:10).*

These ODL activities mentioned have since been discontinued. As such, the opinion was that there is presently little opportunity to be innovative and creative in the realm of ODL teaching. There are restrictions placed on time and resources allocated to teaching, a practice that constrains academics from developing an ODL academic teaching identity.

The lack of consensus among the CEDU participants regarding the status and place of teaching and of research in the development of their academic identities suggests that since academics are unique and experience their lived spaces differently, their views regarding the prioritization or importance of each of the practices varies. When the University opens up space for and places more emphasis on research, space for teaching is then restricted.

Apart from the lack of consensus regarding which role – if either – should receive prominence, other participants brought different views to this teaching-research debate. Their perspective was that the two practices, teaching and research, cannot be separated or the one given precedence over the other because they are complementary and of like importance in relation to the development of academic identities. One participant argued:

*An academic is someone who goes to class and teaches. But an academic is someone who teaches because that teaching is based on the kind of research that they conduct ... An academic is ... someone who will go into class, using his research and publication, profess in class and get students to understand the principles and the concepts... (P30: SLMLM.docx - 30:13).*

Similarly, another participant stated:

*I see an academic as someone who studies, who conducts research, who writes scholarly work; papers, books, but basically I think it's more about doing research and writing about what you are doing and also imparting it in the form of teaching (P28: SLFTV.docx - 28:3).*

Although the description that an academic is one who goes to class to teach does not apply to UNISA as an ODL Institution, this is still a noteworthy perspective regarding the conceptualisation of the roles and responsibilities of an academic.

Two major issues arise from the excerpts. Firstly, inherent in this observation is the suggestion that academics base their teaching on the research they conduct. Therefore, research informs the content for teaching and neither of the two practices should be seen as more important than the other. Secondly, academics have a responsibility to study, write and profess. As much as these responsibilities are related to research and teaching, they are also worth considering as unique because individuals may choose not to study or write but they would still regard themselves as academics. Some may base their teaching on other authors' work and therefore not profess on their own work.

Therefore, professing, studying and authoring are academic functions that are worth noting and should be added to the list of academic roles and responsibilities.

However, some participants indicated a possibility that the prioritisation of one or more roles in an institution may not outweigh academics' power of choice in relation to how they want to develop their identities.

*It depends on a person. As a person you need to be biased at certain things – how do you want to develop? Who do you want to be? Are you more focused on teaching and learning or on research? So, like myself, I love research [more] than teaching and learning... which means I will dedicate more time to research, and also for obvious reasons that we want to grow and UNISA has created that kind of a picture to say the more emphasis is on research than it is on teaching and learning. So that identity you create it yourself depending on what you want or who you want to be (P15: LMAM.docx - 15:18).*

The participant thus suggests that while there are explicit preferences within the “polycontextual” institution (McAlpine, Jazvac-Martek & Gonsalves 2008), academics tend to invest more time and effort on the role they value most in relation to their identity development. On the other hand, work gets allocated to academics and, due to massification and its inherent problems, academics do not always have the power to change the nature of their work allocation. Therefore, the statement that they may choose what they want to focus on may imply that some of the work allocated to them will not be done with as much enthusiasm due to individuals' preferences for one role over another. While they would be developing their identities through the preferred practice, there would also be negative effects on their identities due to the repercussions from paying less attention to the other practice. Therefore they need to give balanced attention to all work that is allocated to them.

In the next section the discussion focuses on the manner in which CE is understood in the CEDU and the manner in which it affects the development of academic identities in the college.

### 5.2.2 Community engagement

As suggested earlier, academics develop their identities through engaging in worthwhile CE projects. The CE and outreach policy (2013: 9) provides guidelines for such engagement by outlining the types of activities that characterise CE at UNISA:

Engaged research must result in knowledge transfer and exchange, and/or the improvement of communities ... Thus research-related community engagement includes research programmes with a community engagement focus ... Sound community development entails leveraging our knowledge and skills to the benefit of communities and improving our research, teaching and learning for staff and students as a result.

The clause suggests that academics are obliged to engage in community research that ensures knowledge transfer and exchange to benefit the community in which the research is undertaken. Thus, the policy metaphorically opens up space for academics to connect the Institution with society through research thereby contributing to the construction of their academic identities. On the other hand, the Institutional policy on CE is informed by policy directives from the Council of Higher Education (CHE) and is consequently mandatory.

The community engagement component of the Community Engagement and Outreach Policy of UNISA is based on the definition of the Council on Higher Education in its Criteria for Institutional Audits (CE and outreach policy, 2013: 3)

Reference to the CHE suggests that the University is not an independent Institution and that it takes its definition of CE and outreach from the CHE policy. It was therefore important in this study to listen to how academics in the CEDU regard CE in relation to their understanding of its relation to their academic identities. The responses revealed varied experiences.

*I find that [CE is] a good experience – to do research there rather than doing desk top research. You find yourself in that environment; you immerse yourself trying to comprehend what is happening there. So, UNISA has offered me that opportunity [as part of] my responsibilities (P15: LMAM.docx - 15:4).*

*[CE projects] provide us with the opportunity to engage with the community, and when I say community I'm referring to all stakeholders, be it teachers, school principals, departmental officials at district level, parents and learners ... (P31: SLMPVL.docx - 31:34)*

CE is thus regarded as an opportunity to engage in empirical research as well as exposure to educational stakeholders, which is a necessary skill for academics to acquire. It is also regarded as an academic's responsibility. On the other hand, while CE is appreciated as a space for academic identity construction, work overload was mentioned as a challenge to its execution. One senior lecturer shared:

*I have about 3 100 students. I must respond to emails ... And now the combination of 3 100 students, the requirements for research, postgraduate supervision, I must write [articles], I must do research. I must do community engagement this side. (P29: SLMGMD.docx - 29:45).*

Regardless of work overload being a constraint, participants commended the support they get in the CEDU in terms of funding for CE projects.

*...when it comes to community engagement, I think there are number of projects that are coming through which are being funded ... (P32: SLMSM.docx - 32:7).*

The next section is dedicated to the discussion on how postgraduate supervision is experienced in the CEDU in relation to its contribution (or not) in the development of academic identities.

### **5.2.3 Postgraduate supervision**

While there are research-passionate and tuition-passionate academics in the CEDU postgraduate supervision seemed to be preferred by all who commented on it. Various



reasons were given about why postgraduate supervision is good for the development of an academic identity.

*I'd be happy to supervise because supervision is research. It's still my passion. [It] develops me so much, because [students] also come with different topics, like this one who just completed ... I was even able to write [with him] - we published a paper this year... That's how much it develops me. I get so much from what they are doing. (P27: SLFMVL.docx - 27:31).*

*I think with postgraduate [supervision] there is more opportunity because, even though the choice of what the student is going to focus on is not yours, you are given the opportunity to influence the direction they can actually take - for example, the kind of research methods that you can actually propose to them [and] the readings that you provide for them... So I find postgraduate supervision more flexible and a more enriching environment in terms of passing on whatever knowledge you actually have and giving [students] opportunities to explore further (P32: SLMSM.docx - 32:7).*

Firstly, a consequence of postgraduate supervision is that academics gain a wider understanding of the field due to exposure to a variety of topics. Secondly, supervisors need to be knowledgeable about the field or the topic so that they are able to guide students into finding relevant literature and determining appropriate research methods. Thirdly, while supervisors acquaint themselves with the content and methods for supervision, they sometimes learn together with the student in the process of supervision.

*As you are interacting with [postgraduate students] you are also learning and you are forced in certain instances to actually explore new research methods, new research areas which in the past you were not directly interested in. So you grow as the student is also growing. You grow with them (P32: SLMSM.docx - 32:8).*

In this case the participant's description of what happens during supervision indicates growth and development on the side of the academic concerned. These three implications of supervision have the potential of developing the supervisor's academic identity. In addition, the university expects supervisors to co-author and publish with their students (indicated in the CEDU quarterly research reports). It is therefore fair to say that postgraduate supervision is a space that enables an academic to develop in various ways. It comprises a space that compels supervisors to develop themselves academically in order to be competent in supervision.

However, the ODL mode of supervision, where students are not located on campus, can be a constraint. Invariably more postgraduate students are registered with the Institution than academics can comfortably cope with. The consequence is that academics often have to supervise topics that are unfamiliar to them or that are not directly related to their areas of specialisation. The problem about this situation becomes evident in the research output of an academic who co-publishes with students, as argued by the participant:

*But it also becomes a problem when it comes to UNISA because it makes you take anyone. Even when you publish, you end up publishing in different areas, which is not what my goal is now. My goal now is definitely to specialise (P27: SLFMVL.docx - 27:32).*

One of the prospects of academics as they develop their academic identities is to be rated by the National Research Foundation<sup>5</sup> (NRF). NRF requires academics to have focused research output to be rated. If academics supervise in areas outside their area of specialisation, their publication history shows too much diversity which could impede their endeavor to secure rating. Thus, the ODL context of UNISA possibly presents conditions which limit rating opportunities. Views and experiences concerning academic citizenship are discussed in the next section.

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<sup>5</sup> NRF rating is a system that is used to benchmark the competitiveness and the quality of research produced by the South African researchers against the international researchers in their fields of specialisation (<http://www.nrf.ac.za/rating>).

#### 5.2.4 Academic citizenship and discipline specialisation

Academic citizenship according to the CE and outreach policy (2013: 4) includes academics' voluntary participation in the Institutional and international structures related to HE and their contribution to discipline expertise at Institutional level and beyond. Academic citizenship includes what Havergal (2015: 1) refers to as the "invisible duties and activities" without which the business of HE may not succeed. The duties and activities include "external examining, peer reviewing, mentoring, and ... various other largely selfless activities ..." (Havergal *ibid*). Therefore, academics in the CEDU need to develop their identities through these roles and responsibilities in addition to teaching, research, CE and postgraduate supervision. As indicated earlier, the IPMS measures their performance according to these academic roles and responsibilities taking into consideration individuals' post levels. For example, a lecturer's performance measures on academic citizenship include, among others, "Level of attendance of departmental meetings, activities and lectures; Level of attendance of School and College meetings, graduation ceremonies and inaugural lectures; Membership of scholarly associations" **(Performance Agreement: Lecturers 2015: 8)**.

The other academic practice that relates to academic citizenship is the mentoring and guidance in duties which they carry out. When academics join an institution, they expect to be oriented, mentored or guided into the operations of that institution. This is more so if a particular academic comes from a different type of institution, for example from a contact university to an ODL institution or from a school to a university. Such mentorship assists in the development of the academic's academic identities through teaching, research and related practices. UNISA has a mentorship program in which each academic should identify someone from whom they believe they could learn and be mentored by that person. The IPMS also expects academics to mentor and coach their colleagues at departmental and Institutional level. However, some newly employed academics complained that such guidance had been lacking and that they had struggled to develop themselves academically in the CEDU. One lecturer pointed to workload as a cause for a lack of guidance and orientation.

*My colleagues are too busy to attend to me ... There is no time to just*

*sit with a person like this and talk and say. 'I have problems here, I have problems there.' Everybody is occupied (P14: LFMVC.docx - 14:15).*

Based on this participant's observation, it can be argued that workload hinders the possibility of mentorship and academic identity development of the less experienced academics. As evident from the comment above, academics appreciated the limited time they had during this research to talk about their experiences regarding their work and academic identities.

In addition to the general guidance needed as indicated, academics also require mentoring and guidance in their specific disciplines. In some departments expertise to offer such guidance and mentoring is insufficient or absent.

*In my department we don't have a senior academic or researcher who can guide us ... Names [of possible mentors] were provided to us to choose from. I couldn't choose anybody because obviously I didn't see anybody who could assist me in terms of the field of research or a research niche. I cannot have a mentor that I always have to mentor ... I need to get somebody with much higher expertise, you see (P31: SLMPVL.docx - 31:30).*

This indicates that even when the department affords the opportunity for mentorship, the discretion of an individual academic determines whether that offer is accepted or not. Due to limited guidance and orientation, some novice academics ended up having to struggle and learn how to carry out their academic duties through trial and error since they were not mentored by more experienced colleagues.

It is also assumed that teamwork may help in guiding and assisting newly appointed academics to carry out their academic duties. Although not specific to the guidance and assistance of newly employed academics, UNISA policy encourages a teamwork approach to teaching as indicated below.

The design, development and teaching of programmes and courses are the responsibility of course teams whose specific roles and responsibilities are clearly delineated. The teams include members of academic departments and members of relevant support departments...Team members reflect on, and make informed decisions about what to teach, the reasons for teaching it, and the way in which it is going to be taught **(Tuition Policy 2005: 6; ODL Policy 2008: 5)**.

The suggestion drawn from this clause is that policy encourages teamwork in the programmes and course designs, development and teaching and that each team member is supposed to be informed of their responsibilities. However, the newly appointed academics in some instances do not get to work in teams. The effect of such lack of guidance has noticeable effects on the newly employed academics as detailed in the following examples of experiences given by some participants.

*When I got to UNISA it was time to develop the EDA, the new qualification. I was given a section to write and it was rejected because I had no idea what I was supposed to do, but if there was team work, things would have been easier (P14: LFMVC.docx - 14:20).*

*So the only deficiency that I saw in terms of teaching and learning was that they only just throw you in a deep end and expect you to swim. ... There are people called programme managers and I never interacted with one since I came here. So, that is a challenge that I see – that if you are a new academic you have to find your own way. There are no structures in place where you can go to a person and ask, how do I do that? (P15: LMAM.docx - 15:5).*

The expectation of newly employed academics that senior staff members who are entrusted with managing programmes should make time to mentor them may also be constrained by workload as mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, the lack of information and orientation in the CEDU regarding academic development practices, such as module writing, is regarded as a failure by those staff members and is a significant constraint in the academic development of newly appointed academics.

Other participants, however, mentioned a number of academic citizenship activities they are involved in, such as peer reviewing for academic journals; involvement in committees for curriculum reviews; the writing of textbooks with people from outside the Institution as well as editing journals. Further, discussions that could be associated with academic citizenship in this study included reference to development in terms of subject discipline or area of expertise. Some participants defined an academic as someone, who is a specialist in a particular discipline and who contributes substantially to that particular discipline or field. By demonstrating expertise or a specialization in a particular field, an academic becomes known and respected in their field, as suggested below.

*I am proud to be an academic, meaning I'm a specialist in a particular knowledge field, I know how to acquire knowledge, and I know how to dispense with knowledge, that is, how to teach people. Basically it comes down to teaching and doing research. It pretty [much] means you are an expert (P24: PMLMM.docx – 24:27).*

*Yes, to develop as a specialist or as an expert you've got to be actively involved in research. You've got to be involved in teaching as well. You've got to be involved in community work (P21: PFPMC.docx - 21:17).*

Through such involvement and exposure academics do not only develop their identities but become citizens in their particular disciplines. In addition to these practices, networking also plays a role in the development towards becoming an expert in a particular field. This view was deduced from one participant who stated that networking is part of academic citizenship and that it defines what one contributes to academic citizenry (P24: PMLMM.docx - 24:27).

In addition, academic citizenship involving collaboration in teaching, research and CE is particularly encouraged according to the Institutional policy. For example, the CE and outreach policy (2008: 7) signifies collaboration and partnership as the “cornerstones of CE” for without this, CE projects may not succeed. Similarly, the curriculum policy (2012: 9) acknowledges the internationalisation of HE which subsumes, amongst others, “the

... prominence of collaborative research.” In other words, policy encourages academics to collaborate with international scholars in their fields of specialisation, thereby contributing in academic citizenship and developing their identities.

Not only international collaborative research is seen as significant in this regard, but the policy also states:

*The different colleges, schools and departments will ... adopt approaches to teaching and learning (including all materials and resources) which foster active learning. An approach of active, authentic, collaborative intellectual engagement will guide the development of such materials (Curriculum Policy 2012: 17)*

Collaborative teaching is clearly also encouraged. Collaboration is also seen as an important aspect of ODL. As such the ODL policy highlights that UNISA collaborates with other distance education institutions for the benefit of the university employees and students.

Another of the key competencies or functions carried out by academics is academic leadership. The following section is dedicated to this role.

### **5.2.5 Academic leadership**

Apart from leadership that is expected from the managers of colleges or departments, the associate professors, full professors and research professors in the CEDU are expected to report on academic leadership for IPMS. In addition to mentoring less experienced academics, academic leadership should be evidenced by “contribution to innovative and leading-edge practices in research” (**Performance Agreement: Research Professors 2015: 3**), CE and teaching, learning and assessment. Associate professors are also expected to be involved in functions that assist the CODs in their departments and to co-supervise students with experienced supervisors. Participants in this study indicated that they were involved in these academic leadership practices of academic identity construction. For example, one associate professor shared:

*I presented a few workshops on CAPS in our department as well as for the teaching practice people. I'm quite involved in [the school]; it is part of my community service at [a high school]. I try to keep my ear to the ground and try to hear what's happening in the schools regarding the new curriculum (P18: PFEH.docx).*

Lecturers and senior lecturers are not obligated by the IPMS to carry out academic leadership practices except for mentoring less experienced academics. It was however, interesting to find that one of the participating senior lecturers was deeply involved in this role. The individual was involved in the management of an academic journal, chairing academic committees in the department, co-authoring articles and books with colleagues and securing funding for a number of research projects in the college. It can therefore be said that academic identity development sometimes has more to do with individual's passion and dedication than the prescriptions stated in the IPMS.

The following section looks at the perspectives regarding how administration relates to the identities of an academic in the CEDU.

### **5.2.6 Administration**

Administration is an activity that is inescapable in any HE institution. At UNISA administration is catered for by policy as a component of good practices of ODL. In the ODL policy (2008) it is stated:

*The University employs sufficient academic, administrative and professional employees to ensure that the ODL business model and systems operate optimally and provide continuous, consistent and quality service to the students (Open Distance Learning Policy 2008: 8).*

To ensure that students enjoy continuous, consistent and quality service, there are three categories of employees at UNISA: academic, professional and administrative staff. In particular, administration takes on different forms in the Institution. Certain administrative activities, such as the development of TLs, should be done by academics



because these are the vehicles through which ODL tuition is done. Other forms of administration which are not academic should be done by non-academic staff.

Many participants were concerned about their engagement in administrative work which eroded their time. For example, academics complain about constant requests to provide information regarding their tuition, research, CE and other academic functions.

Often the same information is sought from different offices and frequently in a different format. The information required remains the same however. Academics find it frustrating and a waste of time to constantly provide information of an administrative nature to different offices. One professor argued:

*The data that comes from that information [that we send once] can easily be collated from a single report and an academic should not be required to consistently present the same type of information over and over and over and over again. If there is one thing that is standing in the way of cramping academics' style, it is admin and management ... (P17: PFCH.docx - 17:37)*

There is also a concern that sometimes administrative information that is needed from academics is unrealistic and unnecessary. It disregards their academic responsibilities and specialisations.

*[The university management] are the ones that launch this and that, expecting this and expecting that and academics are supposed to be in all of these things. They are supposed to contribute in all of these things and the management does not seem to understand that not all academics are interested on what they have on offer. There are academics who are very specialised in particular fields... Have they ever got to see what academics' specialisations really are? (P17: PFCH.docx - 17:37).*

While the concern about non-academic administration expected from academics is understandable, some participants regard even the development of TLs as unnecessary

administration (**P27: SLFMVL.docx - 27:12**). Their negative attitude towards the development of TLs lies in their preference for meeting students face to face, which is not the mandate of the ODL Institution.

In the sections above some of the roles and activities through which academics develop their identities in the CEDU were discussed. These included research, teaching, postgraduate supervision, CE, academic citizenship, academic leadership and administration. In the next section the main focus is on issues other than roles, which are also significant in the construction of academic identities.

### **5.3 ACADEMIC BACKGROUND AND ACADEMICS' OWN INITIATIVES**

Exposure and orientation to specific academic roles and activities is significant in the development of an academic identity. Sometimes academics may not get such exposure and orientation in their present institutions but their background would still play a major role in their development as academics. Notably, none of the literature reviewed for this study identified or mentioned an academic's background as a significant factor in the development of an academic identity. However, during interviews with research participants, the issue of being nurtured into following a career in academe was mentioned as an element of the process of academic identity construction. The fundamental argument was that regardless of institutional policies and services emphasising either research or teaching or any of the other core academic functions, academics may find themselves more inclined to select or focus on that to which they had been exposed or are familiar with. For example, one professor in a management position suggested this was among the key factors that define who an academic is or becomes. As such, he suggested two categories of academics and argued:

*There are natural academics who really have the passion for research. But there are academics that are more oriented towards tuition and those I regard as, I might be wrong, but I regard as those that have not yet been really made aware or conscientised or even [been given] the support that such people need, and most importantly, exposure. I have argued it in many forums, many times, that whilst every one of us is responsible for their own*

*growing of the academic excellence, it's also a question of exposure. There are people around that you can point at; who had an opportunity to be in a particular environment elsewhere in this world, under strong research mentorship; are the people that you can single out and they are making strides. But the majority of us that have not got that exposure, we still are struggling on our own.*  
**(P23: PMGMM.docx - 23:25).**

As the participant states, the assumption about the tuition-oriented academics may not necessarily be true, but the point made is that what an academic has been exposed to during the process of academic development most likely influences the direction in which the academic chooses to develop. However, the discussions also indicated that academic identity development also depends on an academic's own efforts and inclination. Some backgrounds have not been supportive in assisting academics to develop a particular academic identity and subsequently the development of their academic identity has been in consequence of their own efforts. One professor illustrates this as follows:

I remember the first time I really made efforts [to publish] I had to really step up on my own, like a baby who is starting to crawl and standing up and learning how to walk. That was after I had completed my MEd and I realised there was an opportunity to develop two articles from that MEd... There was no one who could take me by hand to say, you know, this is how you do it... So I worked on it on my own, and those two articles ended up being published in the [University research journal] ...those were my very first research output **(P23: PMGMM.docx - 23:77).**

This incident indicates that the construction of an academic identity, of which authorship and publication are a part, is possible even in unsupportive environments. It demonstrates that individuals are able to overcome constraints and achieve through perseverance and diligence (cf. Kamper 2012 in the introduction of this chapter).

However, HE changes or even political changes in South Africa have led some academics to rethink their identities because their areas of specialisation, in which they

were groomed, were made redundant in the Institution. An example of such rethinking is clear from a comment below:

*After the new [national] government came..., [the discipline in which I was groomed] became obsolete. People were saying, “You are preaching untruths to the students anyway and now we have to start a new [discipline] of a new South Africa. Let’s cut it off completely...” We had pressure from all sides to phase out the [discipline]. The focus was on ... new niche areas... Everybody took a very pragmatic short term view... Those that remained ... started focusing on research... I was very disappointed. It felt like I was cut loose from everything in the University. I didn’t belong here at all and I was desperate to find something new in order to keep my job (P22: PMBM.docx - 22:27).*

Therefore, the necessary rethinking of academic identities is not only a consequence of the Institutional changes. It is clear from the participant’s comment above that the change was instigated by a national agenda to which the Institution had to bow. Due to that change the participant had to find a new area of specialisation and develop a new identity in terms of tuition and research.

Up to this point, the research evidenced that an academic is defined by specific roles, responsibilities, background and own efforts. An additional factor in academic identity formation is the issue of expectations – both the expectations of academics and those of the Institution. The next section looks at such expectations.

#### **5.4 ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS, SUPPORT AND STATUS**

UNISA’s policy on research and academic leave for academic employees (2011) states that academics are expected to obtain the highest academic qualification. Therefore, studying towards attainment of the highest qualification is one of the activities through which academics are expected to develop their identities in the Institution. This view concurs with the statement quoted earlier by a participant who mentioned studying and

professing as some of the activities engaged in by academics. Also, some of the participants in the study mentioned that they were studying towards doctoral qualifications, not necessarily because they were fulfilling the expectations of policy, but for their own development as academics. This suggests that, even if indirectly, academics realize and respond to the contemporary expectation to acquire the highest qualification in academe.

Apart from the Institution having specific expectations of its academics, academics also outlined their expectations of the Institution. Among the expectations is the provision of necessary resources to do their work. Among the resources is the space in the form of an office. Such provision is regarded as a demonstration of respect and acknowledgment of the status and needs of an academic.

*.... I need to be respected in terms of being provided with tools that will make my work efficient, so that I can be efficient, especially in what I'm hired for – to service the students, to do the lecturing, although it's ODL, to do my work. So, if you are an academic you need that ... To say I'm an academic goes with a certain status. Maybe it's in my mind, I don't know, but that respect that if I need this I'll get it. (P13: LFMM.docx - 13:26).*

Academics are unable to go about their tasks efficiently or develop their academic identities when they lack the necessary resources. Support is thus one of academics' primary expectations of what the Institution needs to provide to assist them in developing their academic identities.

It became apparent that academic identities in the CEDU are constructed through more than teaching, research and other practices mentioned above. There are academics who are managers but who value academe more than management and therefore have concerns about space for developing the two roles. Their perspectives are discussed in the next section.

## **5.5 MANAGEMENT AND ACADEMIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT**

The complexity of academic identities is evidenced in a case where an academic is also a manager in the department or a unit in the College or the Institution. The Key Performance Areas (KPA) as specified in the Performance Agreement document for the managers involve mainly leadership and oversight of the practices they are mandated to manage. For example, the CODs' KPAs include the leadership and overseeing of tuition, research and innovation, academic citizenship and CE in their departments. They should manage departmental resources and monitor the promotion of service excellence and working stakeholder relationships **(Performance Agreement: COD 2015)**. Similarly, section managers' KPAs involve issues related to effective leadership towards the realization of the Institution's strategies, corporate governance and the promotion of sustainability **(Performance Agreement: Manager 2015)**. As such, managers' performance is measured by the quality of their management and leadership in the departments or sections they manage. However, the positions that managers hold are not permanent. Therefore, many of them regard themselves as academics and therefore carry the obligation to fulfill the demands of an academic. For example, participants posited:

*Yes, I pretty much regard myself as an academic ... I think, that's a very good question because at the end as an individual one has to make a choice between whether you want to operate purely as an academic or as a manager, as a leader (P23: PMGMM.docx - 23:4).*

*I mean, nobody will tell you. It has to come from you what you want as an academic. Do you choose to be a manager full time or do you want to try to do both what is expected of a full professor and what is expected of a manager? (PFPMC P21:6).*

The problem with holding both identities is that time does not allow for both, yet it may not be easy to compromise one for another. These individuals need to do academic work and develop their identities as academics but "sections need to be managed and we cannot run away from it" **(P23: PMGMM.docx - 23:5)**. The consequence of holding both positions is demonstrated in the following comment.

*My position really doesn't give me enough space to be the type of an academic I would love to be because about 70% of my work is on dealing with management issues and those can actually take most of [my] time. For example, I come to work at 8:00 and attend 5 meetings in a day. By the time I leave here, I am exhausted; I cannot even look at my research. That's what worries me, although I have passion about research – that's actually one of my strongest traits – but this management position takes my time. (PFPMC P21:6).*

Academic work and management are, in this case, contending roles in academic identity development. If this kind of management were to be listed amongst the roles of an academic, then attending meetings would possibly be counted as an output for IPMS as is the case with lecturers, for example. But the meetings that an academic manager attends are management meetings in this case and not academic meetings. On the other hand the target academic output gets compromised while the management demands are met.

*I used to publish a certain number of articles in a year. But ever since I [assumed a management position] I can only go for one or two. I can hardly attend a conference. For example, this year [2013] I couldn't attend a conference. I mean, you care more about other people than yourself ... (PFPMC P21:6).*

Although in my review of the managers' IPMS documents I found no measure related to their performance on research output, academic managers feel that they have to produce research and thus act as examples to the academics they lead.

*... as somebody in the leadership position I have to do it even more because I have to lead by example. In my case I'm a full professor. To me a full professor is somebody who is not supposed to do less than three articles per year. So professors have to do that. As a leader I have to do that and actually more (P25: PMVMC.docx - 25:13).*

Considering the fact that their management positions are not permanent, managers' research output may not be amongst their KPAs, but the development of their identities as professors or academics depend on such output. However, although academic management positions present challenges for academics, academic advantages also ensue. One professor suggested:

*Luckily, I became a Head of Department [COD]. I was able to manoeuvre and manipulate the system such that my members of staff can get time for their research and academic leave (P25: PMVMC.docx - 25:29).*

When academics get time for research and academic leave, the departments' research output has the potential to improve. If such improvement occurs, the departmental managers also get recognition as successful managers. This way their identities as academic managers are also developed positively. Therefore, the opportunity to create time for academics in the department is an advantage derived from the position of academic manager.

The sections starting from 5.3 added more information on issues constituting an academic in the CEDU at UNISA. The discussion in these sections is summarised in Table 5.1 below. The A column in the table lists the views concerning an ideal space for academic identity development. The B column lists the views regarding the present situation in the CEDU.

**Table 5.1 Aspects that influence academic identity construction in the CEDU**

Academic background	Strong academic background supports academic development
Own efforts	Regardless of present structures, academics still work hard to achieve their goals
Expectations	Perspectives and observations
Highest qualifications	Academic study to acquire highest qualifications



Support with teaching and research resources	Assumed to be limited in some cases
Respect and recognition of academic status	Assumed to be limited in some cases
Orientation and guidance	Challenged by work load and limited expertise
Collaboration and networking	Provided for by policy
Additional academic roles to be acknowledged	
Management	Not in the list of academic roles

## 5.6 CLOSING COMMENTS

Academic identity is indeed a complex concept. The question that was addressed in this chapter related to the character and nature of being an academic in the CEDU and what the presumed roles and responsibilities of an academic consist of. This chapter has also explored how academic identities are constructed in the College. From the analysis of the Institutional policies and research participants' responses it is evident that on paper there is consensus about academic identities and the development of academic identities but sometimes in practice there are inconsistencies. For example, there are administrative duties that should be done by employees designated as administrators but which are done by academics.

Differences of opinion concerning practices through which academics construct their identities were identified. While some academics want to focus more on teaching, others might want to develop their identities through research. While some academic managers complain of excessive managerial demands versus their academic development, others see their position as an opportunity to "manipulate the system" and develop both the academics under their management and themselves directly and indirectly. The conclusion drawn from these different opinions was that, while there may be Institutional demands about the practices related to academic identities, some academics are able to use their own power and initiative to work in ways that are favourable for their development. In the next chapter the discussion looks at how space is conceptualised in the CEDU.



## CHAPTER 6

### CONCEPTUALISATION OF SPACE IN THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter continues the discussion presented in chapter 5 of how academic identity is understood in the CEDU at UNISA. The discussion in chapter 5 indicated that academic identities are formed in relation to the practices that academics are involved in at the Institution, their academic background and through their own efforts. While the summary provided by Kamper (*ibid*) (see Chapters 1: 1.8.3; 5: 5.1) is regarded in this study as comprehensive in describing the meaning of academic identities, the issue of 'where' in relation to the formation of academic identity is missing in the summary. It is thus proposed in this chapter that when defining academic identities, questions that should be added to Kamper's summary in the context of this study include: Where do academics work while constructing their identities in an institution? What is the nature of the environment in which they work? Where do they want to work? Where are they able to work?

To address these 'where' questions, one may start by asking: What types of spaces are used by academics in the Institution to construct their academic identities? How is space for academic practices produced in the Institution? How do academics experience the space provided them for academic activities in the Institution? The Institutional policy, participants' interviews and observation notes were analysed in this study in an attempt to find answers to these questions. Findings showed that in the CEDU there are basically two types of spaces used for academic practices, namely the spaces provided on university campuses and the home spaces of PWFH. In addition, the issue of non-academic space is also a pivotal issue in relation to academic identity construction given the far reaching impact that it also has on the process of academics developing their academic identities. The findings are presented in this chapter to indicate how these spaces are produced in the CEDU at UNISA and how academics experience them as spaces enabling the formation of their academic identities. The findings are discussed in three sections as follows:

- Working from home as conceptualised and experienced in the CEDU;
- Working on-campus as conceptualised and experienced in the CEDU;
- Non-office space as conceptualised and experienced in the CEDU.

## **6.2 WORKING FROM HOME AS CONCEPTUALISED IN THE CEDU**

In chapter 1:1.2 it was indicated that due to contextual changes taking place at UNISA in response to the general demands made of HE currently, the Institution has experienced a shortage of physical space, especially offices for academic employees. To address the shortage of space on campus the Institution grants professors and associate professors with “high performance” (The directive: professors working from home 2012: 1) the option to work from home (see Chapter 1: 1.2). The offer to work from home is described in policy as a privilege and an opportunity that can be granted or withdrawn at any time (The directive: professors working from home *ibid*). This description may be seen as implying that working from home is not only a matter of alleviating the problem of space on campus, but is also a privilege bestowed on professors in appreciation for their commitment to carrying out their academic duties. In addition, working from home is accompanied by certain conditions, one of which is stated thus:

*[P]rofessors working from home must be present in the Department at least once a week and further for longer periods if required and so directed by the Chairperson of Department or Director of School (Directive Professors working from home 2012: 2)*

The implication is that PWFH also need to be available on campus and it would be fair to assume that when they are indeed on campus, they will occupy a specific “space”. Since it could not be determined how PWFH feel about working from home or about the conditions stipulated in the directive for working from home unless this question was put to them directly, talking to them to establish their views on these issues was vital for this study. As such, PWFH were interviewed and, where possible, they were visited at their home offices to observe them at work in order to understand their perspectives and experiences about working from home. An analysis of responses regarding working

from home revealed that some professors agree that working from home is a privilege. They mentioned a number of benefits and opportunities they enjoy due to being able to work from home. However, drawbacks in the form of distractions were also experienced, confirming that how policy is interpreted by incumbents can differ from what is assumed by policy makers. The discussion in this section focuses first on the advantages of working from home.

### **6.2.1 Perceived advantages of working from home**

The perceived advantages of working from home are grouped into two categories: flexibility in relation to space and time and personal benefits.

#### **6.2.1.1 Flexibility in relation to space and time**

Working from home, as conceptualised by PWFH, provides the opportunity to be flexible in choosing when, where and how to work. Participants consistently indicated that they have a choice where to sit or situate themselves when working from home. The choice is determined by comfort and convenience. For example the Professor I observed at home told me that he frequently changes his work location in response to circumstances and changes in the weather (**P17: PFCH.docx - 17:5**). During my observation I found that there was a room that was supposed to be his study at home, which he actually did not use because, he stated, he found the room stifling and he did not like to feel confined. The consequence was that this person's entire home served as an office since the individual chose different locations to work from depending on his mood or the ambiance offered by a particular room in the house at a particular time of the day. However, in this instance, this was regarded as an advantage since it allowed for flexibility when choosing where to work. Such choices are not possible for various physical and logistical reasons when working from a centrally located on-campus office.

In addition, working from home affords one the ability to manage one's own time. There is no need to use the notorious clock system which annoys many academics who work on campus. For example one participant shared that she sits and works in her pyjamas, warm and casual until about 10:00, without having to worry about being presentable for the public or worrying about traffic since she does not need to travel to the office. At that

time those who work on campus would have been in their offices for more than 2 hours after frequently having had to contend with traffic jams on their way to work. The participant commented:

*...If you work from home...you are treated with professionalism because at least you don't have ICT to make sure that you are sitting behind your desk and we do not have to clock in, unlike people working from office (P17: PFCH.docx - 17:32).*

Without worrying about the clock, a PWFH can work “until 23:00, it's [their] choice” (P18: PFEH.docx - 18:6). Therefore, flexibility about working from home is not only in terms of space but also time. PWFH are able to choose and be engaged in their academic practices at the times that suit them best.

#### **6.2.1.2 Personal benefits**

Personal issues that accompany working from home were interpreted in this study as having an indirect appeal to the practices towards the development of academic identities. For example, one professor mentioned that working from home saves money because she frequents the shops less regularly than she did when she was working on campus and had to travel home past shopping centres or convenience stores where she could easily drop in (P18: PFEH.docx - 18:13). With less temptation to go shopping, thoughts are focused on academic work. In addition, working from home affords the opportunity to have time with family, especially young children.

*It's so nice in the afternoon - I can quickly go and pick [my children] up. I can continue with my work while they do their homework or they go back to school for sports or activities (P18: PFEH.docx - 18:14).*

Being available for one's children due to working from home is an indirect support to academic development. The individual experiences less stress because, since she is home, she knows where her children are and what they are doing other than what she would were she on campus. In this way the academic enjoys psychological support which allows her to function better academically.

Clearly working from home allows these academics flexibility in terms of when, where and under what conditions they work. Working from home is also seen to be less stressful and less distracting thereby allowing time and space for more focused and constructive academic engagement.

In the next section the discussion focuses on the perceived challenges that PWFH face when working from home.

## **6.2.2 Perceived challenges of working from home**

Despite the appreciable benefits of working from home, three categories of perceived challenges were also identified in relation to working from home. First, there are distractions at home which affect the rate at which an academic progresses with a day's work. Second, meeting the requirement to be present on campus as stipulated by policy creates with its own problems. Third, there are challenges related to the CEDU's management of the process of working from home. These challenges are presented below.

### **6.2.2.1 Challenges experienced by professors at home**

During a review of the challenges experienced by PWFH, a number of issues arose which could be categorised according to their nature and scope. These will be discussed below.

#### **1. Social and personal disruptions**

When working from home some PWFH are distracted by commonplace issues such as the proximity of their fridges (which could lead to persistent snacking which could be detrimental to health), easy access to swimming pools (leading to a desire for relaxation and a disruption of focused academic activity) and the incursion of uninvited visitors during the day (imposition on and a disruption of academic activity) (**P22: PMBM.docx - 22:16**). These distractions are viewed as having an effect on individuals' daily academic engagement and progress.

## 2. Isolation and limited social interaction

When working from home, some PWFH feel isolated and it was argued that such feelings could lead to depression. In particular, when one works from home, there is no one with whom one can share the academic stresses and tensions that arise during the course of one's work (**P17: PFCH.docx - 17:21**). This inaccessibility or unavailability of a confidante with whom to discuss issues may slow down the individual's ability to focus on the work at hand, especially if the pressing issue is work related. It is interesting to note that not only was this observation raised by PWFH, but also by on-campus professors who anticipated that working from home could be a challenge. For example, one participant who is in a management position argued that despite not being able to apply to work from home because of his management position, he did not believe working from home was a viable option for him. His opinion was that working from home marginalises the PWFH from the Institutional and academic space. He believed that academics gained much in terms of fostering their academic identity while chatting informally and having tea with colleagues. He held that such interaction was vital for academic development (**P24: PMLMM.docx - 24:9**). It is from such casual social interactions that academic collaborations are invariably initiated and it was argued by participants that PWFH might miss collaborative opportunities on campus due to working from home. Although PWFH may email each other and other academics on campus and beyond, the opinion was that a face to face academic discussion cannot be emailed; this type of social and intellectual engagement is forfeited when working off-campus.

## 3. Challenges with ICTs

UNISA is heavily dependent on ICTs and the availability of advanced technology is mentioned in the Institutional policy as a factor that enables professors to work from home. The directive: professors working from home (2012: 1) states:

*The use of technology also creates the opportunity for high performing professors to work from home, a concept that has been successfully implemented at UNISA since 2007. The approach,*



*where implemented, increases the time available to professors working from home for all academic activities including research. It also alleviates the need for full time office accommodation.*

While policy mentions technology as supporting PWFH and increasing their time for academic activities, technical challenges may occur which slow the professors' daily progress instead of providing increased time as suggested. First, participants found that at times the mobile UNISA internet is extremely slow or 'freezes' and this situation causes academics to miss deadlines (**P20: PFPH.docx - 20:27; P17: PFCH.docx - 17:18**). The email outboxes get clogged with outgoing emails that cannot be sent for days and individuals cannot receive incoming emails in those cases. This is a serious problem because the delayed incoming and outgoing emails could entail notification of a particular academic committee or academic submission, and the delay could have serious repercussions for professors meeting their tuition, academic citizenship and/or research obligations or deadlines. Sometimes the internet restricts the size of the email to be dispatched. Because of such problems, one of the professors was of the opinion that the whole ICTs infrastructure should be upgraded. However, he opined that the Institution "*didn't want to spend the money... because it needs a huge investment to upgrade the whole infrastructure if we really want to do the digital thing*" (**P20: PFPH.docx - 20:27**).

Secondly, the inefficiency of ICTs invariably inconvenienced students due to academics' delay or lack of response to their queries (**P20: PFPH.docx - 20:28**). Consequently, if academics are unable to respond to student queries or academic submissions such as postgraduate work, academics' reputation (which is part of their identities) in respect of students is affected. Thus delaying students' feedback hinders the academics' own development.

Third, PWFH sometimes compared problems regarding ICTs with how the ICT support services handled similar problems for campus-based academics. Sometimes the PWFH are compelled to drive to campus to have their ICT problems solved whereas if they were working on campus such problems would be fixed on campus by campus based ICT personnel (**P17: PFCH.docx - 17:19**). Therefore, although policy indicates working from home is a means to provide time for PWFH to do academic work, time may be

eroded by such setbacks and the need to drive to campus to have the problem resolved. In addition, ICT personnel were unfamiliar with the needs and situations of PWFH and did not fully understand how problems experienced by PWFH should be resolved without requiring them to travel to campus. For example, one participant argued:

*[If you try] phoning UNISA about a computer problem – some people have to be told three to four times that I work from home before it kicks in that I work from home [and that my problem needs to be resolved differently from campus based personnel]. They keep on asking for my office number... There are some people who, unfortunately, will insist that I come over to campus [to enable them to resolve my problem] (P17: PFCH.docx - 17:19).*

Therefore, in addition to the ineffectiveness of ICTs, personnel working with ICTs may also cause problems for PWFH, placing a strain on their time which should be more profitably allocated to academic work and progress. Challenges faced by PWFH when visiting campus as required by policy are discussed next.

#### **6.2.2.2 Challenges experienced on campus by PWFH**

As stated, one of the conditions for working from home is that PWFH should be on campus in order to report to their department at least once a week or for longer periods if required by their CODs. It was identified during the course of this study that PWFH encounter several inconveniences when they visit campus as required by the policy. One would expect that a particular space would be allocated to them from which to set up and work from when they arrive on campus since on campus time is an extension of their academic responsibility. However, due to a shortage of offices, no such space has been designated to PWFH in the CEDU. Initially, a suitable space was allocated in some departments, but this had subsequently been done away with due to the pressure on space (P20: PFPH.docx - 20:10). More especially, the lack of space for meeting with postgraduate students on campus was mentioned as an immense challenge for PWFH. Although it could be argued that professors could meet their students at their home offices, participants perceived this as being undesirable because the home office space is simultaneously private and personal (P20: PFPH.docx - 20:10). Therefore, opening

their homes to students could be seen as an invasion of their privacy. It could also pose an indirect security problem.

Due to the lack of designated space for meetings with postgraduate students, PWFH are required to be inventive in respect of finding a solution to this problem. One academic, however, related how ill-fated her so-called innovative solutions have been for her. In one instance this participant had met with the student in a vacant meeting room without having made a prior official arrangement to use that space. The outcome was as follows:

*A lady that I didn't even know came in and said, "I'm going to lock up the door." I said, "Please I haven't got an office. Please let us finish [my meeting with my student], I'll lock the door and I'll take the key to where it belongs [once I am finished]." "No", she said, "I'm responsible, I'll lock the door. Either you get out or you stay in." Now, I had to get out [in]to the passage with my student... we sat in front of the elevator in two chairs. Everybody that came past asked, "What are you doing? What's happening?" (P22: PMBM.docx - 22:6).*

This experience was the consequence of not having arranged beforehand to use the space in question. Nevertheless, the participant felt that she had been humiliated in front of the student and that was unacceptable and distressing. Therefore, failure to furnish PWFH adequately with suitable space to conduct their business on campus is a disregard for their academic needs and has implications on the recognition of their statuses and positions – their academic identities.

Moreover, public space, whether on or off-campus, is not suitable for discussions with postgraduate students. Some students feel humiliated when meeting their supervisors in public spaces. One professor shared:

*Last week, one of those students said to me, "Please don't do this again. I feel humiliated... When I sit here at the cafeteria [on campus] and everybody comes in, they look at me [and] I can see*

*in their eyes that they feel this is a dumb person. You are the lecturer and you are trying to assist me. I feel very humiliated.”*  
**(P22: PMBM.docx - 22:7).**

Since the cafeteria is a public space, the student felt demeaned by meeting in public. The professor was also embarrassed that she had inadvertently subjected the student to humiliation and that the student had had to point this out to her. Even the library was experienced as unsuitable for discussions with students because it is always fully occupied and monitored for noise including low volume conversation. This makes it impossible to interact meaningfully with the student and engage in worthwhile discussion.

Therefore, the lack of a designated, secure place from which PWFH can work when they are on campus impacts directly the image of the PWFH, their ability to feel at ease, their students and the University. Due to the lack of a designated space on campus for PWFH, the University can be viewed as showing indifference to the needs of and as lacking respect for its academics and students.

In the next section the challenges as experienced from management are discussed.

#### **6.2.2.3 The management of the process of working from home**

As stated above, policy describes working from home as a privilege, implying that the opportunity is bestowed and not enforced. However, it would seem that due to the shortage of office space in the CEDU, college management has at times been obliged to request professors to apply to work from home. Such requests have sometimes been regarded as coercion – especially in cases where individuals had not contemplated the possibility of working from home since they had no desire to work from home. For example, one participant was requested to amend her R&D plans and work from home rather than in her designated campus office in the CEDU<sup>6</sup> (and later to apply to work from home permanently). This was problematic because her reasons for planning to work from her office rather than from home were not taken into consideration.

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<sup>6</sup> This incident occurred during the period of the former School of Education; for the sake of clarity, reference is made to the CEDU in this discussion.

This incident confirmed another participant's view that working from home was not a privilege only for professors as suggested in policy, but was mutually advantageous (to academics and the Institution) and this fact was not indicated in policy. He stated, "*If the full professors and associate professors don't apply to work from home, then [the Institution] do[es] not have space for the new appointees*" (P17: PFCH.docx - 17:34). Clearly, although the policy suggests that working from home is a privilege for those who qualify, the university itself benefits from bestowing this concession. It is in the Institution's interest to afford individuals the opportunity to work from home since vacating their campus offices, frees up office space which is sorely needed to accommodate new appointees.

In the next section the experiences about working on campus are discussed.

### **6.3 WORKING ON-CAMPUS AS CONCEPTUALISED IN THE CEDU**

The majority of academics in the CEDU have offices on campus. According to policy they have to be present in their offices from 7:45 to 16:00 unless otherwise arranged (see Chapter 1: 1.3). During the interviews with on-campus academics and observations of their work space, it was found that these colleagues were less satisfied with their offices and prevailing conditions in their work environment than was the situation with PWFH. They raised a number of reasons for dissatisfaction with the spaces on campus and these reasons are discussed in the following section.

### 6.3.1 Personal preferences regarding office conditions

The main basis for argument about the circumstances of academics' working space on campus was that the best part of the individuals' days were spent in the office. Therefore, the conditions in the office needed to be conducive to the needs related to academic work. Participants voiced and demonstrated their preferences and expectations concerning the work space against what they experienced in reality. Both verbal expressions (evidenced through interviews) and action expressions (evidenced through how the physical space was organized and used) of the personalities, interests and expectation of academics regarding their work spaces were identified during this study. The following comment by a senior lecturer possibly provides a well posited summary of the kind of space that was expected and viewed as supportive of the work of an academic and therefore of the development of academic identity:

*I think because we spend about nine hours at work [every day], the environment must be pleasant; it must be welcoming [and] it must be conducive [to work in]. As well it must be the environment where I must be constructive and stimulated. It must enable me to do the work that I'm supposed to do... a place that [I] would be proud of. When [I] enter [my] office, [I must] smell flowers, fresh air, [and be] comfortable and [I should] know it's [my] space; [I] own [my] space. That on its own is encouraging; that sense of independence ... so that [I] can work comfortably (P29: SLMGMD.docx - 29:28).*

Basically three conditions for making a workspace an enabling environment are mentioned in this response. The space should be pleasant and welcoming; it must stimulate productiveness; it must be comfortable and encourage independence. Visual, olfactory and tactile stimulation within the environment were emphasized as factors which contribute to making the space conducive to academic engagement. The question was whether these characteristics of an enabling space were experienced in reality.

Some participants suggested they found their work spaces unpleasant or unfavourable. This frustration was the result of an apparent lack of concern in some departments regarding the need to provide academics with the office resources required to support academics in carrying out their tasks. For example, in some departments the office furniture provided was inadequate or not fit for purpose and this was perceived as ignoring the basic needs of individuals employed in the Institution (**P32: SLMSM.docx - 32:21**). For the sake of making the environment pleasant, inviting and supportive to academic productivity, some academics brought personal items to their offices. For example, for own comfort, one senior lecturer had brought his own office chair (**P31: SLMPVL.docx - 31:23**). The opinion was that personalised, well organised spaces support the efficacy of the academic. As a form of personalising the space, some participants displayed family photographs in their offices. Asked why she brought family pictures to the office, one participant responded:

*Believe me, they motivate me because I always tell myself that the only purpose I'm doing everything is because of these kids [in the photographs]. I get worried that if I didn't have [these children], I wouldn't be who I am... [Having their photos] just makes me to go on and on. If I want to say I'm tired, I look at those smiles and think I cannot get tired now. They keep you going and saying, 'You know, this can disappoint me but look at them'. They just keep you going. It's just like petrol in a car (**P27: SLFMVL.docx - 27:41**)*

Apparently self-organised personalised space is experienced as motivating and encouraging and beneficial for the day-to-day functioning of some academics. It creates a relationship between personal and academic life which, according to the participant, is needed for the success of each day's academic work.

Another issue that was constantly raised by participants as crucial in a workspace is privacy. As such the arrangement of the offices in some cases was done in consideration of privacy. The arrangement included the direction the individual faced when sitting in the office and the position of the workstation. One colleague posited:

*I don't want my computer to face [the door] because I don't like it when people come in and see what I'm working on. Some*

*[individuals] even come [to] scrutinise your emails to see where they are coming from... (P28: SLFTV.docx - 28:30).*

Thus, the direction in which the computer faced and the position of the work station contribute to functional comfort and providing a sense of privacy and autonomy in the office space.

### **6.3.2 Ambient conditions in the office**

The best part of the CEDU is located in a building where seasonal temperature fluctuations as experienced in the offices are extreme. These conditions have had noticeable effects on academics' work. In summer the offices are stiflingly hot and in winter unbearably cold. Many participants who commented on the issue of temperature in the building indicated that they find it difficult to do their work under these uncomfortable conditions. The general opinion in relation to making these offices more comfortable to work in was that the Institution was not doing anything to alleviate the conditions. For example, one professor commented:

*I think UNISA should have by now installed air conditioners for us... I don't know how to put it, but I think UNISA has got the financial muscle to finance that project. I mean, with all the improvements that are happening on campus, it's long overdue that we should have air [conditioners] in our offices. It's really unbearable and I feel like using it to react to any blaming that [individuals are] never in [their] office. On a hot summer day I need to keep on getting outside to get fresh air, you know (P23: PMGMM.docx - 23:66).*

This statement suggests that due to deplorable working conditions caused by extreme temperature variations and a lack of adequate ventilation, the ability of academics to function effectively is severely compromised. Individuals are obliged to vacate the office to escape the heat and this is a constraint that delays a day's academic progress. The opinion was that management was indifferent to the matter. This opinion was based on the fact that renovations and improvements had been done in other sections of the university, such as the installation of Wi-Fi and upgrading of ablution facilities, but no



visible action had been taken regarding the installation of air conditioners in academics' offices which was perceived to be long overdue. In this case, priority was not given to matters that addressed academics' legitimate concerns about their immediate working conditions such as the extreme temperature conditions in their offices.

*...it looks like the University management is only concentrating on senior management up to now, installing air [conditioners] for them. That, for me, is unacceptable. It's an element of carelessness; not really thinking properly about working conditions...I don't know what is delaying management for considering it very seriously. It's impacting on our jobs, you can't work. There are days when I see myself falling asleep; literally falling asleep because of heat. It's very, very unacceptable (P23: PMGMM.docx - 23:66).*

It is suggested that the delay in the installation of air conditioners in academics' offices is caused by carelessness, disregard for the working conditions or the welfare of employees and ignorance of the possible negative effects of the prevailing office conditions on the work of academics.

However, not all academics were equally concerned about the ambient temperatures experienced and alternatively raised other matters of importance. For example, adequate ventilation and light can be rated as being more important than temperature conditions (P24: PMLMM.docx - 24:13). The concern about office light other than temperature depended on the amount of time an individual spent in the office during the day. Academics in management positions spend most of the day in meetings and not necessarily in their offices. Therefore the effects of temperature fluctuations might not necessarily be experienced in such a case since meetings are generally held in air conditioned rooms as stated earlier.

Other participants highlighted the importance of the natural environment in relation to their working conditions. One participant remarked how important it was to him to be connected to nature and that the sound of birdsong from outside was conducive to his work. He positioned his work station in such a way that nature was invited into his office

so to speak. Despite the office being extremely hot in summer and one would expect that the work station would be positioned well away from the north facing windows, it was located closest to the window which would allow the proximity with nature. The natural environment was experienced as stimulating and advantageous for the purposes of reflection on academic efforts (P29: SLMGMD.docx - 29:18).

It can be said therefore that in spite of the unfavourable conditions in on-campus offices, to some extent academics made the effort to personalise their offices or arrange and establish them according to their preferences. Through these efforts, they hoped to benefit or promote activities and practices engaged in the process of constructing their academic identities. However, this was only possible when the academics had been assigned a personal office space. However, given the shortage of offices in the CEDU, it was sometimes inevitable that academics share offices. When academics were required to share office space, the personalisation or arrangement of office space in a preferred way became difficult as the needs of the other academic with whom the office was shared had to be taken into consideration. The next section presents participants' perspectives concerning the sharing of office space.

### 6.3.3 Perspectives regarding sharing of office space

Apart from instituting the PWFH project whereby professors who occupied offices on-campus vacate the offices to work from home thereby freeing up office space for campus-based academics, the practice of sharing office space is another attempt to resolve the matter of the lack of office space in the CEDU. However, unlike the case of PWFH, the Institutional policy does not address the issue of shared office space. Policy only provides direction on how the total space available to departments should be allocated and whose responsibility it is to allocate such space to individual employees. The policy regarding the utilisation of building space (2005: 2) states:

*Space is allocated to a regional office/college/department in a building ... The allocation of space (offices) of individual employees is the responsibility of the Executive Dean/Executive Director/Regional Director. The Executive Dean/Executive Director/Regional Director is the manager of the college/regional*

*office. The allocation of offices to employees forms part of the responsibility of the manager.*

Although the policy recognises the Dean as being responsible for allocation of offices to individual employees, it does not give guidelines on what the Dean should do in the case where there is a shortage of offices. It can be said therefore that the decision is left to the discretion of the Dean of the college to ensure that employees are accordingly accommodated. Thus, due to a shortage of office space, academics in the CEDU have been required to share offices.

The general opinion of all the research participants – those who were sharing offices at the time of the study, those who had experience of sharing offices in the past and those who could only envision what it would be like to have to share an office – was that sharing offices was not conducive to the execution of practices towards developing academic identities. Examples of inconveniences, disruptions and risks were mentioned – all of which impacted negatively on how academics engaged with their core functions as listed in Chapter 5. For example, asked about his opinions regarding the sharing of offices, one participant posited:

*That is bad.... because; let me give my own example. I work better when there's noise. When it's just quiet, I cannot [work]... So, if you have a colleague [sharing an office with you], that colleague may be disturbed by the noise you'll be making in this case. [Also], I work well with the papers all over. You remove one paper, you disturb me. I would know where the paper is or the journal article is and I want it there and the way it was opened. So ... some colleagues may say, 'ah, your table is untidy ...' [Sharing offices] can cause unnecessary frictions (P15: LMAM.docx - 15:13).*

Two main points arise from this response. First, people have different preferences regarding the conditions of their offices. While some work best where there is the usual order, peace and quiet in an office, order for others is noise and what may be regarded as disorder. Given the kind of work academics engage in where rigorous and consistent

effort is constantly required, it is to be expected that it cannot be conducive to productivity to require academics to share offices – especially when their preferences for the nature and conditions of their workspaces differ so considerably. The preference that certain individuals show for having sound in their working environments was a notable finding considering that literature mentions noise as disruptive to the comfort and appeal of academic space. However, some academics prefer to have music playing in the background for them to work well. For others, this situation could be untenable since they prefer absolute quiet and music which colleagues might find soothing, they would find disruptive. Yet other academics prefer to work in conditions where ambient noise surrounds them since they find these sounds normal and reassuring. Yet others find such noise an irritating distraction. Because of different personal preferences, such as those alluded to, possible conflicts between colleagues sharing offices were envisaged.

The issue of ringing phones and responding to phone calls in the shared office was constantly mentioned as the biggest problem experienced. Yet telephone calls are inevitable in the academic work environment. Students and colleagues all use the telephone as a means of communication. Clearly, requesting that telephones be switched off or that academics sharing offices refrain from using telephones is not a viable option.

The other main consequence of sharing an office space is compromised privacy, which is said to be accompanied by the possibilities for conflict and lack of trust between the colleagues sharing an office.

*Even the space where you keep your stuff, anyone can access. You have your computer on, you go out to the toilet and you don't know what that person [you share an office with] will do to the computer. So, you are at risk. The University is putting you at risk compared to your other colleagues [who do not share offices] and yet they are expecting you to be handling the situations in the same manner. That is a problem (P16: LMSV.docx - 16:12).*

Therefore, in addition to compromised trust as indicated above, shared offices put academics at risk. It is understandable that the colleague may be concerned about leaving the computer in the office with another colleague because from time to time individuals work with confidential information. It is therefore risky to leave that kind of information accessible to others, even if it is for a short while.

More especially, this lack of privacy in shared offices was raised in relation to academics with visual challenges, who, therefore have to use audio-computers. The participant who raised this concern was worried that such academics could not be able to work freely in cases where they shared offices because whatever they would be working on could be listened to by the people they shared offices with. There are individuals in the CEDU to whom this concern applies, but since they did not participate in the study, their experiences and opinions could not be established first-hand.

The scenarios outlined above cause significant stress to individuals who are obliged to share offices. It would certainly be more conducive to engage in intellectual and scholarly work in circumstances that did not require the sharing of office space. One colleague suggested:

*An office is a private space; a sanctuary and [it] is a place where you can reflect on your ideas. You can't reflect on your ideas when you share [an office] with someone and the other person is shouting or is talking on the phone. That's not how it is. My office is my sanctuary. I can lock my office, switch my lights off and sit here and reflect on ideas and work. You need that space. (P30: SLMLM.docx - 30:14)*

Reflection is a critical activity in the process of academic identity construction. Sharing offices constrains the opportunity to reflect and therefore ideas that would be generated towards the development of an academic identity become limited. Despite all the drawbacks mentioned regarding sharing office space, academics who share offices are expected to produce the same amount of work as those who work in their own offices (P16: LMSV.docx - 16:12; P15: LMAM.docx - 15:16)

A different but related case of disruption associated with sharing office space is found when an academic is required to share an office with non-academic administrative personnel. At face value one might conclude that this is no different from sharing office space with other academics. However, that was not the case as the following lecturer who experienced this situation first-hand explained.

*Life was too difficult for me because in the administrator's office there was a lot of up and down movements, especially when exam scripts or assignments were there. The markers had to come into that particular office to collect scripts or assignments. Sometimes when there were lots of assignments I had to move out because my table would be used to do the counting [of those assignments or scripts] (P14: LFMVC.docx - 14:10).*

It would appear that the difference between the nature of activities wherein the two colleagues were engaged was not taken into account when decisions regarding the sharing of office space were made. The lecturer's work was disrupted to the point that at times she had to leave the office to accommodate the administrative situation. That compromise and frustration compromised the academic's progress. Therefore, due to the different nature of activities that academics and administrators engage in, it is unreasonable to expect academics to share an office with administrative staff.

Some CODs have directly experienced the effects of sharing offices because they also had to share their own office space with the academics they manage. When one considers the risk involved in sharing office space, the CODs sharing their office with junior colleagues placed them in an untenably risky situation since they were sharing an office with the people they were managing. Confidential information is commonly found in managers' offices. Under these circumstances, this would mean that, apart from confidential information about themselves being available, confidential information regarding all other academics in the department would be at risk. Should such information leak, these managers as well as the academics working in their offices would be suspected of being untrustworthy, with detrimental effects to their integrity as well as their academic identities. As a result the CODs who found themselves working

under these conditions had to be particularly vigilant when sharing offices with academics (**P25: PMVMC.docx - 25:37**).

Academics who shared office space with their CODs found that their day's schedule was dependent on the availability and presence of the COD in his or her office during the course of the day. If the COD had to leave office early, the schedule of the academic sharing office space would be disrupted and he or she would have to find another place to work. Among the other inconveniences experienced when unable to work from the CODs office was a lack of access to emails (**P28: SLFTV.docx - 28:16**). Restricted access to emails is a direct limitation to the work of an academic at the CEDU because email is a key means of communication between the Institution and management, colleagues and students.

Despite the frustrations discussed above concerning the shortage of and need for sharing office space in the CEDU, self-motivation was found to be a significant factor in determining academics' success. In some instances, academics were not deterred from being academically productive despite their circumstances since they were committed and self-directed. Their motivation ensured that they were productive despite these setbacks, although the opinion was that they would have been able to do their work more effectively had they had their own offices and not been subjected to the inconvenience of sharing office space (**P31: SLMPVL.docx - 31:24**). Therefore, self-motivation is imperative in the quest for academic identity development.

The question that might be asked regarding the experiences shared here is how the participants and the CEDU were addressing the problem of shared office space. It became evident during the course of the research that academics were generally unaware of the procedure to follow to request the allocation of resources and facilities. The protocol for office allocation is stated in the Policy regarding the Utilisation of Building Space (2005) as outlined above. However, from the discussions, the general impression was that the CODs were to blame for the conditions leading to sharing of offices by academics. The misinformation about the policy could be the reason for confusion and misdirected consultation. It needs to be noted that the concern regarding the sharing of offices was not restricted to academics who found themselves in this

situation. CODs were similarly worried about the shortage and necessity of sharing offices. One stated:

*People who are working with me [in my department] do not have [their own office] space. So, that affects me because I end up pairing them. If you pair two professionals, they are not productive and that affects the production of the whole department, and that actually affects your own morale as [a manager]. And instead of focusing on activities like research, I sit down and start worrying about how I [should] resolve this kind of problem. So, physical space is a serious problem here at UNISA. It inhibits our performance in other areas such as research and community work (P21: PFPMC.docx - 21:11).*

Three issues emerge from this comment. First, the CODs were not ignorant of the challenges associated with the sharing of offices. The sharing of offices was associated with limited academic productivity among the affected academics. Second, the CODs were not only aware of the challenges, but they were also directly affected by the situation. Their academic identities as good departmental managers (see Chapter 5) depended on the output of the academics they managed and that output was affected negatively when academics were obliged to share offices. Third, in addition to the academic demands they faced, CODs were forced to spend time resolving the problem of office space. This situation directly affects both their management and their academic performances. Therefore, it can be said that to some extent sharing offices is not an individual's but a departmental problem because when one academic runs short of the expected output that shortage becomes the departmental shortage – and the shortfall of the COD as well.

Apparently, the bureaucracy complained about by some participants in Chapter 5 also affects the allocation of office space and is the cause of the blaming mentioned earlier. Because the allocation of office space is not their responsibility (as per the policy), CODs have no control over the number of offices allocated to their respective departments. There is a hierarchical line of communication that needs to be followed.

*My line manager cannot do anything about [the insufficiency of offices] because the*



*buildings are controlled by the University Estates. So for me to communicate with the University Estate I have to go through the line manager, who's also expected to go through the Dean. So, I have little power, honestly, but, down there, our colleagues think we have power (P21: PFPMC.docx - 21:16).*

Despite the limited control that CODs had over the problem of office space, some participants felt that the CODs were not treating the matter with the seriousness and urgency it deserved. For example, only after the Dean of the CEDU witnessed the problem personally that the issue of office space in one particular instance was attended to. Should the academics have had direct communication with the Dean, the opinion was that the matter would have been resolved much earlier. This however required that the academics were informed that the responsibility of office allocation resided with the Dean and not the COD as most apparently believed. Therefore, bureaucracy has a negative effect on academics' welfare.

Although policy indicates the Dean is responsible for the allocation of the office space, at departmental level the CODs have to work with and assign to staff the number of offices allocated to their departments. In cases where they were obliged to occasion academics to share offices, CODs had to develop criteria regarding the decision about who would share offices. One of the criteria was the consideration of academic post levels. Generally it was lecturers who were asked to share offices, not senior lecturers or professors. For some, this criterion was regarded as demeaning and unsustainable considering that lecturers were in the process of developing themselves with a view to higher post levels (P13: LFMM.docx - 13:23). Also, the opinion was that if lecturers were made to share the offices, their growth towards professorship was delayed due to the problems inherent to sharing offices.

When problems arise about the availability of space, solutions are required. This was the case with regards to space in the CEDU. Consequently, a building which is part of the university estate but located off the main campus was identified as a possible solution to providing the required office space. Preparations were made to relocate some academics to that building. The next section is focused on the experiences of participants about relocating to these offices.

#### 6.3.4 Alternative office space

Certain departments that experienced a shortage of offices relocated some of their academics to the VUDEC<sup>7</sup> building off the main campus. Some colleagues who were not affected by the lack of office space on campus also volunteered for their own reasons to relocate to the VUDEC offices. A closer investigation of the decision to place CEDU academics in the VUDEC building can be seen as being contrary to the policy regarding the location of academic departments. The policy states, “Academic departments forming part of a college ... should be located together (Policy regarding the utilisation of building space 2005: 1). The logic of this arrangement cannot be disputed. However, this ideal could not be realised in the CEDU due to a shortage of space on the main campus. There were differing views about the placement of academics in the VUDEC building. Some participants were not happy about the placement and felt that they were being “pushed away” from the main campus yet others chose to be located there.

Dissatisfaction about relocation to the VUDEC offices was attributed to three main issues. One colleague shared:

*I was the first in my department to be pushed in [to] this VUDEC thing. And since I've been here, I think it's about six months now, not even at one stage did I see one of my seniors come here to see where we're staying, you see. So these are some of the things that I perceive or view as not supportive because what they care about is me being in the office but none of them has seen where I'm working or even the condition and the context under which we are working. You see, and it's puzzling (P31: SLMPVL.docx - 31:22).*

Apparently, the reasons for feeling “pushed” into this situation had more to do than just the situation or location of the VUDEC. Instead, the provision of office space is not

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<sup>7</sup> The Solomon Mahlangu building (VUDEC) is located in the centre of Pretoria, about 2 km from the main campus.

enough without the demonstrated support and care for the academics. The departmental managers (“seniors”) were viewed as being indifferent in supporting academics in the VUDEC building and this situation was experienced by the participant as unacceptable. Some participants commented that they were new to their departments, having been there for a few months only, but experienced their CODs as indifferent to their needs; they did not help source office furniture or to connect office phones. The opinion was that instead of showing concern for the welfare of academics under their management, the CODs were more concerned about academics being present in their offices. For example, if an individual did not answer the phone, the assumption was that the individual was not at work. This situation was described as an indication of a lack of interest and of trust in academics as people. The only concern was for academic productivity and this was perceived to be demoralizing (**P16: LMSV.docx - 16:14**). The conclusion drawn from this situation therefore is that academics need more than just a physical office space – they also need to feel valued and appreciated. The suggestion is that when management allocates a new office to an academic, the manager should ensure that the individual is settled and provided with the necessary resources and facilities. It is important for the COD to show an interest in the academic’s personal well-being.

It was also suggested that placement at VUDEC could have been done more systematically than was the case. The fact that academics from different departments had been relocated to the VUDEC campus was in itself unfortunate as more than one department was affected by this situation. The process followed was also in contravention of policy directives where it was explicitly stated that colleagues of the same department were to be housed in the same location. The relocation process that was instituted resulted in various individuals leaving colleagues who were teaching in the same discipline on the main campus. This compromised collegiality. For example, one professor suggested that on campus colleagues of the same discipline routinely “pop up” to each other’s offices to share discipline related thoughts (**P23: PMGMM.docx - 23:62**) and this possibility was severely compromised when academics were housed in different buildings, particularly when they are not on the same campus.

The other concern that participants had was that they were uncertain about the permanence of their relocation to the VUDEC offices. Such uncertainty caused psychological and emotional anxiety and affected the level of their ability to focus on

work.

*You don't know whether to relax and say, 'this is my office, this is my space' or whether you'll be packing and going<sup>8</sup>. You are not settled and immediately you are not settled like that then everything else also can't function well. You've got to be emotionally settled as well and psychologically settled. (P28: SLFTV.docx - 28:7).*

Therefore, the shortage of physical space affects academics in different ways including having a psychological impact. On the other hand, those participants who volunteered to transfer to the VUDEC campus described the campus as quiet, with fewer interruptions from noise in the corridors compared to the main campus. This was an interesting subjective perspective considering that from my observation, VUDEC campus was subjected to traffic noise and other city activities since it is located in the city center. In one instance an interview with one participant was interrupted by the school bell from a nearby school that rang in the middle of the interview and we had to pause the recording. However, that experience seemed to be of little concern to individuals who liked the place and were happy with their location. Therefore, the choice of where to work as an academic overshadows the circumstances that might be regarded as disruptive by someone who does not occupy a particular space.

### **6.3.5 Non-academic office space**

Administrative work at UNISA requires the availability of non-academic office space for tasks such as receiving and processing students' assignments and for holding academic meetings. As is the case with office space, UNISA policy provides guidelines for the allocation of non-academic office space. The policy regarding the utilisation of building space for administrative purposes (2005: 4) states:

*An additional space allowance not exceeding 5% of a*

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<sup>8</sup> While the study was still in progress some colleagues were moved back to the main campus and others were moved from the main campus to the Sunnyside campus.

*college/regional office or department's total space entitlement may be allocated for administrative activities (e.g. sorting of mail, storage, microcomputers, etc.)... Such spaces are not supposed to be used as ordinary offices.*

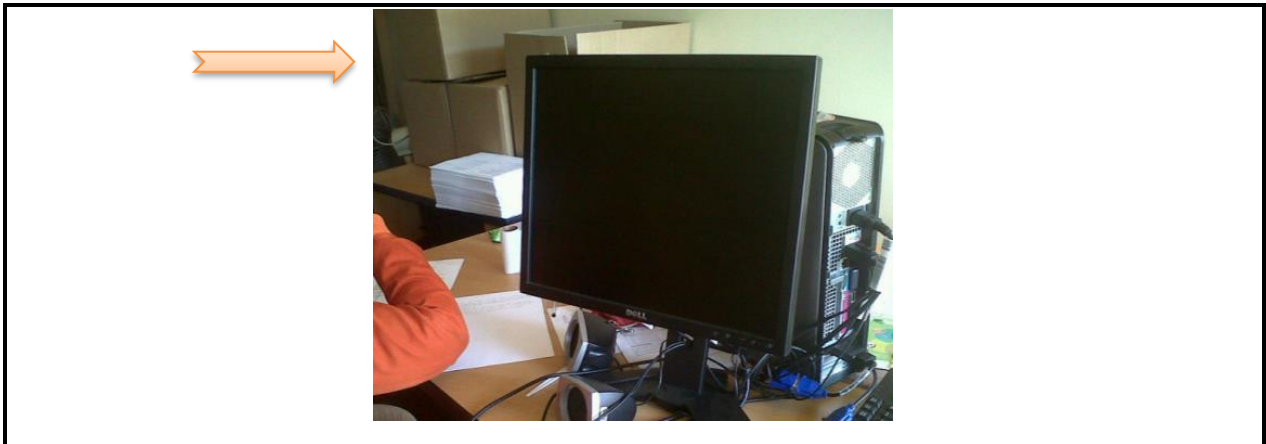
While policy states that the non-academic office spaces mentioned should not be used as offices for academics, this allowance was either insufficient or was not being judiciously allocated in the CEDU. At the time when the study was conducted some departments did not have additional space as indicated in policy. This situation was frustrating and detrimental to the work of academics as suggested by the following comments by some participants.

*We don't have the post room. We wait for assignments which come after two weeks, and we have to report [on our progress of marking the assignments]. This year we don't even know where our assignments come from, who delivers them, unlike in the past where every morning you would go and check your pigeon box. Then you would know, ok, I have 10 portfolios. Then I need to process them, you see. Now I don't know where my post comes from. Sometimes I get things two weeks late (P13: LFMM.docx - 13:19).*

*A lot of our offices are also used as storage... if you go down the passage, you look at the offices [and there are] the exam papers. People don't know where to put [them]. They don't have enough space in their offices to store students' assignments and exam papers securely. That, to me, is critical (P24: PMLMM.docx - 24:20).*

Notably the shortage of non-academic office space affects teaching. As a consequence of the shortage of administrative office space, there are delays in receiving and processing students' assignments and correspondence. This puts the identities of academics at risk since their competence in regard to providing a service to their students comes into question. This also puts at risk positive student-lecturer relations. Moreover, academics' offices were used to store materials that were supposed to have

been stored in a designated administrative space. During my visits to participants' offices, it was common to find lecturers storing files, boxes and papers in their offices. These items were supposed to be kept in non-academic office spaces (see Fig. 6.4).



**Fig 6.4: Office used as storage**

This situation showed that even though policy provided for the creation and utilisation of administrative office space, in reality this space was not necessarily adequate and designated academic office space was used to accommodate the overflow from administration. This situation, according to my observation, resulted in those offices being cramped and dismal, a condition that is not conducive to academic productivity.

The CEDU also needs space for holding formal and informal meetings. In relation to informal meetings, departments previously provided tea rooms where academics were able to meet informally over tea. These facilities were also on occasion used for casual discussions and meetings beyond teatime. However, these spaces have been repurposed and many had been changed into office space. As commented earlier, casual conversation has the potential to stimulate and generate ideas which can give rise to collaborative research initiatives. One professor reflected on how such space was used previously.

*That is of course the biggest thing to take away tea rooms because that is where revolution starts, you know. When we had to abandon [some courses] we talked in the toilets, in the tea rooms. That is where the basic things start. If they take away that and*

*there's no room now, they make it inhumane. So then people will become less humane. There'll be no sharing and collegiality and there are still a few colleagues that I can ask, please read my article. We are losing out (P20: PFPH.docx - 20:34).*

Another

*It's not as if you decide beforehand that you will discuss this today. It just evolves naturally. Somebody starts saying something and people start discussing about this and it's really stimulating. You walk out there feeling exhilarated and as if you've got new energy from the top. And it's different from the people who have a colloquium about a certain topic because then the energy of finding a common topic is taken away from you because somebody else has used up that energy of deciding what topic is going to be (P17: PFCH).*

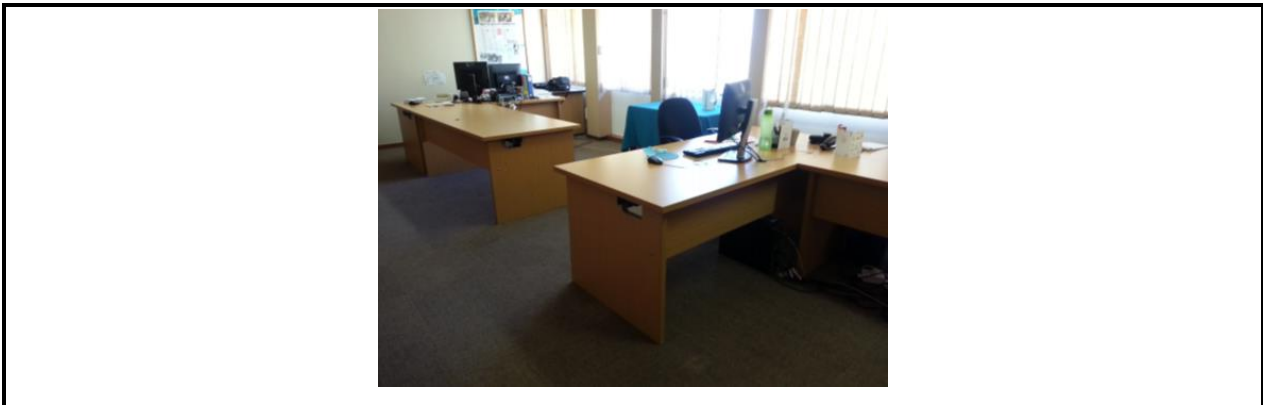
This withdrawal of places where informal yet vital interaction between academics had taken place in the past, has not only significantly limited the opportunity for casual talks by academics, but also has imposed several direct impediments on academic identity development practices due to the withdrawal of these places are mentioned in these comments. First, social interaction that used to take place in those rooms is deterred or lost. Social interaction breeds collegiality and sharing which are some of the crucial elements of academe. Further, although it is possible to organise a space for formal academic meetings or seminars to present academic work, this is not the same as a casual meeting space which generates spontaneous or incidental discussion of academic ideas.

The significance of space for informal academic discussions in academic identity construction is suggested in the following comment:

*[There] should be a space in which work that is being done by individuals should also be shared. We might be working in the same college, but you find people don't even know the areas of research that somebody is embarking on, and yet there might be*

*common interests [on]... may be, methodologies, approaches ...  
You might find that somebody has relevant methodologies which  
may support you... I think there is the necessity to create [those]  
kind academic space, for academic engagement (P32:  
SLMSM.docx - 32:42).*

This comment indicates that, in addition to spontaneous talks and discussions, academics also need space for planned academic discussions regarding their work. From having access to such spaces and engaging in discussions that spontaneously emerge through one's presence in these environments, people may learn from each other and develop their academic identities. Due to the shortage of offices, a room large enough to hold these kinds of meetings as well as departmental meetings and colloquia was converted into a shared office for administrative staff (Fig 6.5).



**Fig 6.5 Former meeting room used to accommodate administrative staff  
2.jpg - 36:2**

Since the re-purposing of this room and its forfeiture as a meeting room, academics have struggled to find space to hold meetings. For example one participant commented:

*The other thing that I really think that we are out of is the meeting space. It's a huge crisis to find and to book a venue for a meeting if you just want to have a quick meeting. Venues are already booked and the venues are not properly equipped. It's always a struggle. It takes time to set up your data projector; your equipment. Our meeting venues are not conducive and they are not really functional (P24: PMLMM.docx - 24:17).*



In this regard, the participant even suggested the kind of space that might work better for the CEDU in this regard:

*I really think that every school, at least in the College, has to have a fully functional meeting room, with all the facilities, the screen, the data projector, set up in a way that you can just walk in and have a meeting, and they have to be big enough. The Dean has a board room, but it's too small. Too often we can't use it because seats there are not enough. It's crowded and stuffy (P24: PMLMM.docx - 24:18).*

The planned and unplanned meetings could be adequately accommodated if such spaces were available in the CEDU. The proposal made is, however, not feasible under current circumstances where the shortage of space prevails.

In addition to a shortage of storage space, post rooms and meeting rooms, participants complained of continual noise on campus, either from within the corridors or from outside. One participant suggested that academics' offices need to be sound proofed due to the nature of work they do.

*I find this [the sound of a lawn mower in the background] to be very noisy, but, [apart from that] there's always some distraction. There's always noise of some nature going on. The offices are not really sound proof and it can be very destructive [distracting] at times (P24: PMLMM.docx - 24:10).*

In addition to noise which was described as distracting and disruptive, the participant mentioned that due to a lack of non-academic office space, items such as boxes, documents and redundant furniture were stowed in the corridors. The concern was that these items (see Fig 6.6) not only clutter the corridor making it aesthetically unpleasing, but are a safety hazard for all who use the corridors.



**Fig 6.6 Items in the corridors.jpg - 38:2 - 40:1**

Although the items placed in the corridor are obviously placed there temporarily, they are still hazardous for staff as well as the students who are visually impaired and unaccustomed to having their passage obstructed.

Another of the non-academic office spaces that is of significance to academics is the library. In the next section the discussion is on how the library as a space is conceptualised in the CEDU.

### **6.3.6 The library**

The library has been suggested earlier as one of the university spaces that could be used for practices such as discussions with students. From the policies that were reviewed for the purpose of this study, there is no particular mention of how the library should function to support academics in their tasks. However, the participants were clear on what they expected from the library and they were happy with the way it functions. The primary function of the library is to support research which is one of the academic identity development practices. Academics can also rely on support from library personnel. Innovations with regard to how the library can be used best and improvements to its functionality, has resulted in the digitisation of resources to allow users access to e-resources. Comments made included:

*UNISA library is one of the best libraries when it comes to research. That's something that we need to commend (P32:*

**SLMSM.docx - 32:26).**

*I think the library offers what it is supposed to offer. You get support from the library. I've been getting support from the librarians ... (P28: SLFTV.docx - 28:8).*

The concern from academics on the VUDEC campus was that they were far from the main library; the nearest library was on the Sunnyside campus, an inhospitable environment, since it was “*too congested and depressing*” (P28: SLFTV.docx - 28:8).

It was found in this study that access to and comfort in the Institutional space also depends on the availability and the condition of parking space. The next section pays particular attention to the issue of parking space for academics.

### **6.3.7 Parking space and its effect on academic practices**

Parking is one of the non-academic spaces that affect academics' day-to-day practices. While this was found to be the case at UNISA, literature that was reviewed on HE spaces does not mention parking space as a significant factor affecting academe. Similarly, none of the policies accessed for this study makes mention of the relationship between academic work and parking space. However, this research found that the shortage of parking space is a factor that significantly impacts academic identity development: it adds to the stress academics contend with on a daily basis and influences how they organise their day at work.

As indicated in Chapter 1:1.3, UNISA has grown exponentially in both student and staff numbers. A direct consequence is that space is particularly limited. Findings indicate that in addition to the lack of academic office space and administrative space as discussed previously, parking space has become so limited that “it's virtually impossible to come [to campus] in the morning because there is no room [to park]” (P20: PFPH.docx - 20:11).

*You would want to leave UNISA because of parking; because you plan your time around parking. You may want to come at 7:45 but you will spend an hour looking for parking. This is frustrating us. It's*

*really frustrating us. (P28: SLFTV.docx - 28:9).*

When the issue of a lack of parking space is explained in this way, it is clear that it affects academics' ability to conduct their work efficiently. It impacts on academics' time to the extent that planning the day's work requires that an individual should first consider the prospects of finding parking. A professor working from home commented:

*I have to come in, for example, for a meeting with [the people I work with]. Their offices are in the Gorong building. Then I park there – nearest to the tower; the last six places. It takes me half an hour to get back here and then half an hour to get back there again... I hate every time I have to get in here because I know I'm not going to get space. I'm not going to get parking space (P22: PMBM.docx - 22:8).*

Because parking is so limited in terms of the number of individuals requiring parking, academics find themselves spending about an hour walking to and from the parking to get to their offices or meeting venues. The opinion is that this time spent could be used much more productively. Moreover, the waste of time in trying to find parking space is found to be most frustrating. This frustration occurs at the start of the day and has the potential to negatively affect the individual's attitude to the rest of the day. One participant shared that on one particular occasion, she had changed her day's plans, and had gone back home because she was unable to find parking. This is a problem because her day's plans in office might be meant to contribute on the development of her academic identities.

## **6.4 CLOSING COMMENTS**

The two dimensions of space, the physical and the imagined, were discussed simultaneously in the sections above. While participants were sharing their experiences regarding the access and use of physical space and policy, a third dimension, the lived space, was revealed. The lived space, however, was extended in this study to include the metaphorical space in order to accommodate issues of support, time, freedom and voice regarding academic identity construction. Although these elements of space

featured in the discussion above, the next chapter elaborates and adds to the issues related to them.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **INSTITUTIONAL AND COLLEGE POLICY ON THE METAPHORICAL SPACE**

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#### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 6 the manner in which the physical space at UNISA is produced and experienced was discussed. The discussion in Chapter 6 responded to two of the study's research questions: how space is conceptualised in the College, and how the Institutional and College policies define and relate to the utilisation of space. The conceptualisation of space as discussed in Chapter 6 mainly related to the imagined space (policies) and the physical space (buildings) and the analysis of the findings revealed the experiences that participants had of the two dimensions of space. It was indicated that those experiences are the third dimension of space. This chapter is purposed to pursue that discussion with the intention of establishing how the CEDU or UNISA policy supports the development of academics' identities within the space in which they work. Moreover, this chapter is intended to elaborate on the role that academics play in developing their academic identities in the Institution. The chapter is composed of five sections as follows:

- Trust as a space for academic identity construction – where the discussion indicates how trust (or the lack thereof) may affect the endeavours towards academic identity construction;
- Opportunities as space for academic identity construction. In this section policy is analysed with regard to the ways in which academics are supported (or not) towards the development of their identities. Participants' perspectives about policy are also presented;
- Perceived counter-productive policy. As much as some policy content is experienced as supportive of academic identity development, some content and practice is perceived as counter-productive;
- Personal traits as space for academic identity construction. In this section the views of participants are presented in relation to what academics do or can do to develop their identities regardless of the perceived counter-productive policy;

- The last section concludes the chapter and introduces the next chapter.

## 7.2 TRUST AS A SPACE FOR ACADEMIC IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Two findings related to trust were presented in Chapter 6. First, in Chapter 6: 6.2 a comment was made that professors are granted the opportunity to work from home because they are trusted by the Institutional and the College management to work without direct supervision. This way, trust is enabling to professors who prefer to work from home while it seemed to be constraining to those professors who did not choose to work from home but were forced to by the prevailing shortage of space on campus. For example, one professor who was requested to work from home agreed to the request because of the mention of trust even though she was not interested in working from home. She narrated her conversation with a College manager as follows:

*He said, "Please, please ... You've got an option of working from home. We haven't got space for you. Won't you please apply" I said, 'I don't want to work from home'. He said, "We **trust** you, you are a senior professor and please, you can really assist us if you take that option." Once again, that's the type of a person I am, 'in that case, alright' (P22: PMBM.docx - 22:16).*

Secondly, in section 6.2.2.2 comments indicated that when academics who share offices do not trust each other, their sense of autonomy and liberty to work without restraint becomes restricted/confined. Therefore, these findings suggest that trust is a space that can either enable or constrain academic work and identity development. The presence of trust is enabling; the absence thereof constrains academic identity development.

This study found that some academics whose offices are on campus prefer to work from home in the same way as the PWFH. They based this preference on the fact that they work better at home (e.g., when they are on academic leave or before going to office in the mornings) than they do when they are on campus. However, those who had indicated their desire to work from home were not allowed to do so because they were

not professors (**P17: PFCH.docx - 17:26**). Such a response was interpreted as indicating a lack of trust on behalf of the institutional management that academics at academic levels below the professorship would be able to work independently away from campus. In addition, the lack of trust was seen to be contained in the policy that stipulates office hours (**Policy on official working hours, UNISA 2013**) and clocking in and out. This policy was perceived as evidence that academics who work on campus needed to be “policed” and could not be trusted to work the necessary number of hours without monitoring. The following comments refer:

*I should not really feel like I'm policed when I've got to enjoy that freedom as an academic (P23: PMGMM.docx - 23:51).*

*[Academics who work on campus] are not trusted. They are seen as the other end of the stick; the little children behind the desk who have to be policed to make sure that they behave themselves. They are not treated with the professionalism that they should be (P17: PFCH.docx - 17:29).*

The metaphor of being policed suggests that the policy limits freedom for academics to work unhindered according to their own individual plans and preferences. The limiting of such freedom is seen as inappropriate for the academic profession. Some participants shared that in the past the Institutional policy used to be more flexible about presence in office. The policy was changed when it became evident that some academics were abusing the trust and freedom bestowed on them. Consequently, control measures regarding presence in offices had to be instituted. One participant commented:

*I think there are people that are made to suffer because there are bad potatoes in the bag and instead of dealing specifically with those few potatoes ... [all] people are made to really suffer the consequences of that (P23: PMGMM.docx - 23:51).*

The ‘bad potatoes’ in this case are those academics who cannot be trusted to carry out their duties unless they are monitored. This comment indicates that because policy



cannot be individualized, the unscrupulous behaviour of certain academics has unfavourable consequences for all, a situation that was described as unfortunate (**P23: PMGMM.docx - 23:51**).

While some participants mentioned that they felt policed, others suggested that the issue of 'policing', especially in relation to absence from and presence in the office, depended on the COD. It was felt that the monitoring of presence had little to do with the Institutional policy. Some CODs were reported to be more inflexible than others regarding monitoring office presence. Some clearly mistrusted their personnel and thereby limited academic autonomy (**P18: PFEH.docx - 18:8**). While this was the case, there was an assumed relationship between a more relaxed management style and increased departmental research output. For example, in one of the departmental meetings I attended it was suggested that the department was achieving above average regarding its research outputs as a whole. This achievement was ascribed to the relaxed management style of the COD which opens space for working free from unnecessary restrictions. The COD was described as a person who is able to open space for working flexibly as long as individuals were able to 'deliver' as expected (**P15: LMAM.docx - 15:10**). This flexibility indicates that academics were trusted by the COD and that trust enabled them to develop their academic identities.

Another practice that was interpreted by participants as indicating mistrust by the Institutional management was that of academic reporting. Twice a year academics report on accomplishments and mention the plans they have for further achievement during the year. When such reports are made, evidence should be attached. There seemed to be a concern from some participants that the need for such evidence suggests that academics were not trusted by their managers. In particular, the concern was that not everything an academic can be presented as evidence; if academics were trusted, they would not have to be expected to always produce such evidence. One professor stated this strongly as follows:

*What annoys me though is the mistrust. You have to prove – when you go for IPMS, bring evidence, as if the COD doesn't know who you are and [isn't aware of] your kind of work. [My work] is out in the open! It's not in a private space... But he has*

*to do it because his superiors are going to look at him [to provide evidence] (P20: PFPH.docx - 20:7).*

The lack of trust is blamed at the two levels of management: the COD and the levels higher. This situation adds to the concern discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 about the constraining effects of bureaucratic management on academic practices. Because of the hierarchical reporting, academics need to perpetually keep track of what they do and if they miss evidence, the ensuing judgement is that they are not performing. This demand was regarded as an indication of mistrust which was demoralising. In the following section the discussion is focused on opportunities as a metaphorical space in the process of academic identity construction.

### **7.3 OPPORTUNITIES AS SPACE FOR ACADEMIC IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION**

While there were concerns that some managers in the CEDU were more interested in academic output than the welfare of academics, a number of opportunities exist that create space for academic growth and development at UNISA and the CEDU. Such opportunities include grants and related funding towards research and development as well as motivational awards for academic practices. These opportunities are stated in policy and many are realised in practice by certain academics. They are discussed in the following sections.

#### **7.3.1 Curriculum development as an academic identity development practice**

Curriculum planning and development as part of HE scholarship was found in this study to be a way in which identities of academics are developed. Therefore, space is needed for curriculum planning and development in the same way that it is needed for other roles and responsibilities of academics as discussed in Chapter 5. UNISA policy provides metaphorical space for academics to develop quality curricula and learning materials. The policy then stipulates that such curricula and learning materials should be recognised as research output for the promotion of individuals to higher academic grades (**Curriculum Policy, UNISA 2012: 19**). Promotion to a higher academic level is one of the ways in which an academic identity is developed. Therefore, although it is

hardly mentioned as such in literature, curriculum development as a dimension of tuition is an academic identity development practice in the context of this study.

Furthermore, the policy also states that colleges, schools and departments should allow sufficient time for academics who develop curricula by re-evaluating their key priorities **(Curriculum Policy, UNISA 2012: 19)**. When viewed this way, time is space for curriculum development and, in turn, for academic identity construction. If time is not sufficient for this practice, quality would be compromised and that would affect the image of the academic who developed the curricula and learning materials. Therefore, time allocated for the development of curricula and quality teaching and learning materials is time allocated for academic identity development. Academics who commented on the practice of curriculum development as a practice for academic identity development confirmed that enough time is offered in their departments to support their endeavours in this regard. For example, one PWFH indicated that he was once a programme manager, but has since been relieved from that responsibility because of his involvement in curriculum development.

*I was a program manager for [a qualification], but they took away the program manager's functions... So there's not much program management going on at the moment ... [because] I'm part of the PQM committee for the new curriculum. So I compiled the curriculum for the new 2015 curriculum for [the qualification] senior phase and FET (P18: PFEH.docx - 18:3).*

In addition, policy encourages that academics who develop and review curricular should be given sufficient support **(Curriculum Policy, UNISA 2012: 19)**. Therefore, support in this case is a metaphorical space. As indicated previously (Chapters 5: 5.4; 6: 6.3.1) it is difficult to develop an academic identity in an environment where there is inadequate support. Therefore support represents power that academics have been provided with and can use to develop their identities. One of the examples of developing academic identity is through curriculum development.

In addition to the policy that allows time and support for curriculum development, CEDU academics are also assisted in the evaluation of their modules to ensure that these are

current and relevant. Guidelines on module evaluation are provided through the office of the CEDU Manager of Teaching and Learning. The example below provides insight into the purpose, nature and parameters of module evaluation as understood in the CEDU.

*The Department of Institutional Statistics & Analysis (DISA) has developed an instrument that can be used by lecturers to evaluate their modules. [The DISA] are quite willing to assist lecturers to have their modules evaluated and [the DISA] also has a software package that can help to interpret the results. It has been indicated that the instrument can be adapted to suit the particular needs of a module... Let us use this opportunity to improve the quality of our students' learning experiences (Manager: Teaching and learning, Email, 13 March 2014).*

This communication indicates that the Institution is mindful of finding ways to support academics to ensure that students perceive them as providing quality tuition. The manager describes the availability of the module evaluation instrument as an opportunity to improve the quality of students' learning experiences, but it may also be seen as an opportunity for improving the quality of the identities of individual academics who make use of the instrument.

In the next section focus is on funding as space for academic identity construction.

### **7.3.2 Funding as space for academic identity construction**

Some practices and processes through which academics develop their identities may succeed when there is adequate funding. Academics who participated in this study acknowledged the privilege of being in an Institution that is able to secure funding for their academic development in various ways (**P28: SLFTV.docx - 28:4**). One such funding is mentioned below:

*The Thuthuka Programme... is an initiative to render financial support to black academic employees at previously white*

*institutions, to women in research and to researchers in training. The main objectives of the Thuthuka Programme are to develop black and women academic employees, to prepare them for research leadership roles at higher education institutions, to identify ways of assisting women researchers in re-entering the research enterprise and to build the research capacity of aspiring researchers at the start of their research careers (Policy on grants from the research funds, UNISA 2012: 10).*

Although the Thuthuka programme is from the National Research Foundation (NRF) and not originally from UNISA, getting funding from the programme is an opportunity that UNISA affords academics who qualify. Qualifying academics are assisted in applying for this funding and other similar grants. In addition, academics that fail or do not qualify to get funding from such programmes as the Thuthuka are also entitled to apply for other forms of funding from the Institution such as a scholarship for a masters' or a doctoral degree **(Policy on masters' and doctoral support for permanent UNISA employees, UNISA 2013)**. Academics are widely informed about such opportunities through policy and different forms of media: emails, verbal, notice boards and seminars.

Policy at UNISA also offers opportunity for funding for the attendance of conferences and workshops. Even academics who do not have research funds receive funding to attend conferences.

*If an applicant is a developing researcher, he or she may be supported for domestic conference attendance twice within the period that he or she is considered to be a developing researcher... (Policy on Grants from research funds, UNISA 2012: 14).*

Amongst the stated conditions to qualify for this funding is that “the domestic conference relates to the research area of [the applicant's] postgraduate studies” **(Policy on Grants from research funds, UNISA 2012: 14)**. Therefore, in addition to support that the Institution offers towards academic identity construction through conference attendance, academics are also encouraged to focus on particular fields of speciality while still developing. This, as indicated in Chapter 5: 5.2.3, would help them when

applying for academic rating. Policy allows developing academics to attend the domestic conference even if they do not present papers for the sake of skills development. Participants appreciated funding as space for academic identity construction – as evidenced by the following comments:

*UNISA is a well-resourced Institution. It's one university which I actually enjoyed the privileges of being there in terms of research, conferences and stuff like that. So in that way, it's a well-resourced University, which actually creates a space and time for people to do some research (P25: PMVMC.docx - 25:20).*

*There are lots of opportunities. People go to international and local conferences. There are opportunities for skills training, going to workshops for writing and workshops about the core duties like supervisions. I have experienced UNISA as an Institution that offers opportunities for development for academics... It's up to [individuals] whether [they] take them or [they] don't, but there's always everything: call for proposals, call for funding call for whatever ... (P28: SLFTV.docx - 28:4).*

Importantly, academics have the choice whether to apply for funding or grants that are available in the Institution or not. Choice is an aspect that is regarded as space in this study. Therefore, in addition to the availability of funding as space for academics, there is also choice as space. Some participants compared UNISA to other institutions where they had worked before and posited that a number of opportunities offered to academics at UNISA are absent in other institutions.

*It's not every university that will [allow] you to go [to] conferences having no research funds... (P28: SLFTV.docx - 28:4).*

Among the opportunities that are regarded as unique to UNISA are the incentives given to academics who have supervised postgraduate studies to completion.

*Not any other university that I know of actually gives academics incentives for producing Master's and Doctorates; that you get your R30 000 towards your conference attendance or to finance your research activities. It motivates me to supervise, even when it's a lot of work for me. But the fact that there's something that one gets in return for doing that (P23: PMGMM.docx - 23:47).*

In this case, financial incentives are appreciated as space for doing more postgraduate supervision and, in turn, developing the identity of an academic.

### **7.3.3 Awards and grants as space for academic identity construction**

From literature that was reviewed during this study no publications were identified that posit that awards and grants for academic achievements can be regarded as space for further academic development. As such, this was regarded as a gap in HE literature on space that matters for academic identity construction; this hiatus may be attributed to the fact that such awards are taken-for-granted. Yet, in an ODL Institution where focus has historically been on tuition more than other roles and activities of academe, the significance of such awards and grants may not be underrated as they form part of the rethinking and restructuring of the identity of the Institution. Such rethinking and restructuring includes supporting academics into developing other roles in addition to that of tuition.

Among the awards open for CEDU academics to aspire to is the Excellence in Tuition award. Academics who want to be considered for this award should evidence striving for excellence in their tuition which simultaneously requires developing their identities as excellent teachers. Policy encourages academics to apply for the award by submitting a portfolio that evidences good practices in ODL teaching (**Policy: Excellence in tuition award, UNISA 2013: 1**). Therefore, despite the concerns raised by research participants in Chapter 5: 5.4 about the lack of support for initiative and creativity regarding teaching processes, or the appreciation for effort put into teaching in an ingenious and innovative way, the Institution does provide a reward for good practice regarding tuition. However, in Chapters 5: 5.5 and 6: 6.2 participants mentioned limited time as a constraint with regard to implementing innovative teaching methods.

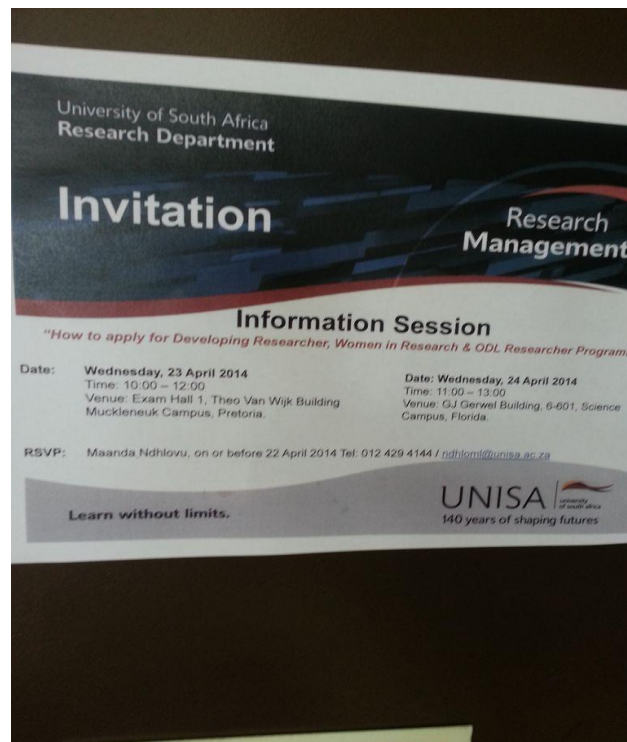
This constraint was blamed on the changes in the management of tuition issues and the implementation of the semester system. Although policy does provide academics with the opportunity to aspire towards excellence in tuition, mitigating factors such as semesterisation which affects a large proportion of the modules taught, abound. Furthermore, practices through which tuition excellence could be promoted such as discussion classes and satellite broadcasts have been discontinued which means that the opportunities for demonstrating initiative and creativity have been reduced.

Awards are not granted only for good tuition at UNISA but also for excellence in research. For example, during the yearly research and innovation week, awards are conferred for different categories of best practice in research. These awards include, but are not limited to:

- Developing Researcher Women Award – for a developing woman researcher who has produced at least three research publications in peer-reviewed conference proceedings and academic journals;
- Leadership in Research Women Award – for women researchers who have published outstandingly in the past five years, supervised postgraduate students and mentored other colleagues.

These awards motivate academics in the CEDU to work diligently and, in the process, improve their academic identities. In addition to the emails that academics receive about the opportunities to apply for such awards and others, calls for applications are posted on the notice boards, as in Fig 7.2 below. The poster invites academics to an information session where they would be shown how to apply for the awards. There is a specific unit in the college which supports academics in applying for the grants and awards that are offered by the Institution. Therefore, in addition to awards as space, there is also information and communication as positive space for academic identity construction in this case.





**Fig 7.2: Opportunities advertised**

Apart from the awards and grants other financial incentives are also a space for academic identity development in the CEDU and the Institution in general. For example, subsidy from research funds accrued from publishing in accredited journals is given to academics to use at their own discretion (**Policy on grants from research funds, UNISA 2012: 9**). Academics who thus gain respect in the international community of scholars publish in accredited journals and their work is peer reviewed. The incentive provided to UNISA academics who publish in such journals may therefore be seen as an opportunity for earning both incentives and recognition as distinguished scholars.

For some participants, appointment to the position of a research professor is regarded as an award because of their passion for research and the benefits that accompany the position (**P27: SLFMVL.docx - 27:12**). Requirements for appointment to this position are to obtain a NRF rating and to thus produce research beyond the norm. The policy states:

*A research professor will be relieved of undergraduate and honours tuition, but will retain the core functions of postgraduate supervision, community engagement and academic citizenship, in addition to the increased research function (**Policy on research***

***professors 2012: 3).***

This is a motivation for academics to excel in research and scholarship. It is a metaphorical space open especially for research-passionate academics.

Other grants that are available to academics include a grant for the completion of postgraduate studies, such as the policy on masters' and doctoral support for permanent UNISA employees and the academic qualifications improvement programme (AQIP). AQIP, for example, pays fully for an academic to study either for a masters' or a doctoral qualification. It also includes salary payment for a substitute lecturer for the duration of the academic's study period.

While many policies discussed above are mainly commended for allowing space for academics to develop their identities, some Institutional policies were perceived as limiting progress. These are discussed below.

#### **7.4 PERCEIVED COUNTERPRODUCTIVE POLICY ON ACADEMIC IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION**

Counterproductive policy is understood in this discussion as that which is assumed to impede the goals of academics towards developing their academic identities. The policy on research ethics (UNISA, 2012) is regarded by some participants as a counterproductive policy. All research projects at UNISA, including CE projects, must be ethically cleared before commencement. In the past, this process was not followed and consequently some academics, especially those who are unfamiliar with ethical clearance processes, regard it as a constraint and posit that it delays postgraduate students' progress (**P20: PFPH.docx - 20:13**). When postgraduate students' progress is delayed, supervisors are indirectly affected in their delivery of the graduate and the possibility of co-publishing. The concern raised related to the amount of time the committee takes to return feedback to applicants.

*Whilst we appreciate processes like [ethical clearance] to be in place, we wouldn't in anyway want to block progress as well because at the end it impacts on throughput and things like that.*

*You can imagine if a student is ready to go into the field and all they are waiting for is ethical clearance, and they are held back...*  
**(P23: PMGMM.docx - 23:53).**

In addition, unhappiness about the way the research ethics committee operates in the CEDU was expressed. It was argued that even academics were not trusted to conduct ethical research since their own research has to be cleared by the ethics committee according to the policy.

*I understand [the ethics review process]. I perfectly subscribe to it but I think it is such an over exaggeration; that staff members are not even trusted to write an article if they do not have ethical clearance. What damage can I do if I write a conceptual article, for instance? And of course if I embark on research I will not contravene any ethics!* **(P20: PFPH.docx - 20:14).**

The opinion was that if academics were trusted fully, they would be permitted to conduct some research without prior ethical clearance and it should be assumed that they will avoid contravening ethical norms and standards. Thus, the committee was labelled as counterproductive. A noticeable improvement in this situation was, however, also mentioned by some participants. The process has been streamlined and the committee guides researchers on the completion of the ethics application form; additional information is also sent electronically to academics through the office of graduate studies.

Other issues mentioned by participants were not necessarily in policy but were regarded as restricting academic progress. Among those was the mention of poor communication in the Institution, contradicting the views mentioned earlier of effective communication of opportunities. Sometimes information about resources available for use by academics was poorly communicated. Some participants felt that this information should be communicated by the College or departmental management. An available resource in the Institution is Wi-Fi. The opinion was that the Institution did not communicate effectively about the availability and the processes regarding the availability of Wi-Fi to academics.

*We are an ODL Institution and [Wi-Fi] is actually the epitomisation of online work but there has not been a statement that informs the academia that this is how you access the Wi-Fi. It's on a need to know basis... That's not how things should be. That to me is clear indication of how poor UNISA communicates things... (P30: SLMLM.docx - 30:25).*

However, informal conversations with some academics indicated that ignorance on the side of academics could be to blame in some cases. This is because, as stated above, some information is sent directly through intranet to all university staff and such information need not necessarily come from the College or departmental managers per se. On the other hand, an example of poor communication was observed when personnel arrived to install Wi-Fi in an office without informing the occupant of the office. The only option for the occupant was to leave the office due to noise caused by the installation. A similar experience was shared by the participant whose office is photographed in Figure 7.3 below. The participant had to continue working regardless of the presence of people working at her door because of pressing deadlines. Prior warning of an appointment for the installations on that particular day was not given.



**Fig 7.3: Distraction in office**

Not only was the process of academic identity construction affected by the opportunities as well as distractions that were mentioned by participants, but academics' personality

traits also played a crucial role on how they do their work within the space of different dimensions in the CEDU. Those traits have been part of the discussions in the preceding chapters and certain traits are discussed in the next section.

## **7.5 PERSONALITY TRAITS AS SPACE FOR ACADEMIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT**

The process of academic identity construction does not depend only on policy and directives issued by the Institution. Academics' beliefs, attitudes and values play a major role in that process. Basically five dispositions (discussed in Chapter 8 to show their relationship with the personality traits identified in literature) were found to either enable or constrain academics' space to work and construct their identities: compromise, reaction to challenges, religion, goal setting and dedication and determination. They are interrelated, but are discussed separately in this section for the sake of clarity.

### **7.5.1 Compromise**

Some participants in this study were able to compromise their deserved comfort for the sake of harmony in their shared offices.

*I compromised but now that affected my work and her [the person I was sharing an office with] work in the sense that even if she had her own visitors, work related, common sense told me I needed to go out so that I could not listen to their private conversation (P13: LFMM.docx - 13:11).*

In this case the attitude of compromise, which is the participant's disposition, affected the ability to focus on the work at hand as the academic had to leave the shared office frequently for the sake of harmony. Therefore compromise can be a constraining factor in the construction of academic identities.

### **7.5.2 Reaction to challenges**

Findings presented in Chapter 6 revealed different challenges that academics face in relation to space for the construction of their identities. The way in which academics

react to those challenges is crucial in determining the direction that an identity construction process would take. For example, some academics adopted a more aggressive attitude, contending for the space they felt they deserved (**P26: SLFMV.docx - 26:10**). Some opted to keep quiet and work even if they were not satisfied with their space, as long as it did not affect their work. Some opted to leave the projects they had initiated because of the way they felt they were being treated in their departments (**P31: SLMPVL.docx - 31:34**). Therefore, attitudes and personalities have an ability to constrain or enable academic work.

### 7.5.3 Religion

Religious beliefs also have a significant effect on the functioning of an academic. Asked how he managed to do well as a professor under the stressful conditions of academe, one professor mentioned his religion as a source of strength. He posited:

*I have a very strong Christian Calvinist upbringing which says to me, everything that you do, do it to the best of your ability. That is part of my upbringing and that is me for no other reason. That is the only reason. It's my dispositions. It's my Christian disposition. It's my Christian ethic – it's biblically founded that everything that your hand finds to do, do it to the best of your ability and thereby bring glory to God... If God gives you a talent, whatever you do, do to the best of your ability so that He may be glorified (**P17: PFCH.docx - 17:17**).*

Considering the achievements of the participant, who is a full professor and works from home, it can be deduced that even if religious beliefs are not the only factor that leads to achievement in academe, it remains an aspect to be reckoned with as stated by the participant.

### 7.5.4 Goal setting and self-discipline

Many participants mentioned the willingness to work beyond the official working hours set by the Institution as a means of achieving their goals in academe. This is regarded as a disposition because not all are able or willing to work as many hours as some

participants mentioned. For example, one professor stated that he wakes up at 01:00 to work. Few individuals are able to follow such a rigorous routine. Therefore, as much as policies may influence academics and their practices, self-discipline plays a significant role in academic identity construction. In addition to time management, setting the goals to achieve was also mentioned as a contributing factor to academic development:

*You must also set aims for yourself – objectives (P18: PFEH.docx - 18:21).*

*You [should not] just come to work. Some people just come to work; that's the danger. A lot of people here leave home and come to work. I'll tell you very clearly; they have no idea what it is they want to achieve at the end of the day. It may sound technisist, but the bottom line with that is that it's quantifiable... you set aside this target, you set aside this time. You want to do this (P30: SLMLM.docx - 30:10).*

The participants suggest that if academics do not set daily quantifiable goals, the possibility is that nothing will be achieved by the end of the day. This practice may not necessarily be laid in policy but depends on individuals' values and attitudes towards their work.

### **7.5.5 Dedication and determination**

Personal dedication and determination are significant, crucial dispositions in academe. This was illustrated by one professor who was furthering her studies, by doing a master's thesis on online teaching methods at another university. Although she was funded by the Institution, her interest in studying for a qualification of a lower level with limited time is commendable. Self-determination and dedication are attitudes that optimise initiatives for personal growth and development.

Therefore, successful academics succeed not only because of conducive working space provided by the Institution. Personal dispositions or traits have a crucial role to

play in this regard and through these dispositions academics produce space for their academic identities to develop.

## **7.6 CLOSING COMMENTS**

In this chapter the metaphorical space for academic identity construction was discussed. Trust, freedom of choice and opportunities became prominent as concepts that form a metaphorical space in the CEDU. It was indicated that policy creates a metaphorical space and participants have differing experiences about such space. In addition, academics' values and attitudes also have a role in defining the success of academic identity development endeavours. These values and attitudes were also discussed in this chapter. In the following chapter the conclusions drawn from the findings and the recommendations that emerge from the research are presented.



## CHAPTER 8

### SPACE AND ACADEMIC IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN THE CEDU AT UNISA: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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#### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to examine the CEDU academics' experiences of space at UNISA with regard to its effect on the practices through which they construct their academic identities through a self-ethnographic research design. Specifically the research question was posed regarding how space in a specific ODL context enables or constrains academic practices around which academics construct their identities. At the core of this study's investigation and analysis was the concept space as conceptualised by Lefebvre's (1991) and Soja's (1996) Thirdspace, who regard people's experiences about space as a component of space together with the physical space and the practices taking place in that space as well as the mental representations of space. It was argued in the study that in the current HE context which is characterised by ongoing change that destabilise academics' identities and the development of their academic identities, the influence of space on the continuous rethinking, reflection and reconstruction of academic identities is not well known. In order to contribute knowledge to this gap, this study examined first how academic identity is understood and constructed in the College. This examination of the manner in which academic identity is understood and constructed was regarded as a foundation for the major purpose of examining the influence of space as indicated.

This chapter is purposed to answer the study's main research question by first giving a summary of the findings to each of the first four sub-questions as presented in the preceding chapters. Thereafter, the findings are discussed to synthesise and make sense of their meaning and to draw conclusions in relation to the main research question. The answer to the last sub-question, namely, '*How should space be managed or created for optimal academic identity construction in the College?*' is addressed in the section on the implications of the research findings and the recommendations made in this study.

## **8.2 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The main findings from this study are summarised in relation to each of the research questions (RQs) that were explored in chapters 5, 6 and 7. The summary is made in conjunction with the literature and theories that were reviewed for the study.

### **RQ1: How is academic identity understood and constructed in the CEDU at UNISA?**

In many respects, the findings to this question were consistent with the literature discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 about what academic identity entails. Many of the reviewed studies mention a number of roles and responsibilities that define an academic (Billot 2010; Churchman & King 2009; Evans & Nixon 2015; Feather 2010; Findlow 2012; Hanson 2009; Henkel 2005; Jawitz 2009; Madikizela-Madiya 2014; Moeng 2009). Similarly, the findings presented in Chapter 5 of this study indicate that UNISA policies, as well as the participants of all academic ranks understand academic identity as defined by particular roles and responsibilities such as tuition, research, CE, postgraduate supervision, academic citizenship, academic leadership and administration. This understanding of the identity of an academic was similar for all categories of academics who participated in the study.

In addition, changes and factors that were mentioned in the literature as affecting academic identity construction endeavours such as limited time, work overload and neoliberal managerial demands (cf. Adam 2012; Hyde, Clarke & Drennan 2013; Gonzalez et al. 2014; Gornall & Salisbury 2012; Oyetunji 2013; Urnal & Oztuk 2012; Winter 2009) were found to be experienced similarly by participants in the CEDU. The difference is that in the context of this study the HE changes that are said to destabilise or keep academic identities shifting (Stensaker, Henkel, Välimaa & Sarrico 2012) are more complex than in other contexts. The complexity is caused by the fact that the identities of academics in the CEDU are not only affected by the global changes in HE, but the identity of UNISA as an Institution is itself changing from solely a tuition institution to competing with research institutions due to the converging global HE changes. Therefore, academics in the CEDU are faced with a double pressure and dilemma regarding the Institutional and global changes to which they should adapt, abide and not fall short.

The findings indicated basically eight roles and responsibilities according to which UNISA evaluates the worth of academics through the IPMS and on which participants commented when asked about the construction of their academic identities within the Institution. The first two, which are regarded as contending and on which the change of the Institutional identity is clearly focused, are research and tuition. Following the global trend in HE changes in which research has been prioritised over tuition (cf. Adendorff 2011; Schulze 2014), the historical ODL identity of the Institution, in which tuition was the main agenda, has shifted and the academic emphasis has moved towards research. One of the observations on which this conclusion is based is that tuition time has been shortened in the Institution through the introduction of the semester system and the discontinuation of a year module system.

There are a number of consequences emanating from the introduction of the semester system which were interpreted by the participants as indicating the Institution's reduced interest on tuition. Firstly, in several instances the mode of tuition and the range of activities and assignments students were previously expected to complete has been significantly changed and reduced due to the shortened time students have in which to engage with their learning material. Students no longer have the time to engage in meaningful research projects due to the shortened length of time allotted to the module in terms of the semester system. Consequently, assignments and projects have been significantly curtailed in scope and depth to accommodate the semesterisation of the modules (see Chapter 5: 5.2.1).

Secondly, tuition activities which were previously emphasized and promoted, such as the presentation of discussion classes and video conferencing with students, have been significantly reduced and even discontinued (Chapter 5: 5.2.1). These activities were previously motivating and fulfilling for academics and played a significant part in academic identity development as many academics excelled in these teaching strategies and consequently these efforts boosted their tuition identities. Therefore, the shift of emphasis to research has limited the opportunity and the need for academics to develop their identities in relation to creative and innovative ODL teaching strategies. Those academics who previously aligned their identities with tuition rather than research have had to rethink and reconstruct their academic identities to suit the current trend.

The third role that is considered for IPMS and regarding which participants shared their experiences is CE. While academics appreciate CE as one of the practices through which their identities are constructed, work overload is a challenge to its execution (Chapter 5: 5.2.2). This finding is not unique to the CEDU. Gonzalez et al. (2014) and Anderson (2006) mentioned work overload as a consequence of the prevailing trend of the massification of HE. This situation places significant pressure on academics who are obliged to be productively engaged in ever changing academic roles. However, in an ODL Institution, where time and space are supposedly open, academics are supposed to work flexibly and have enough time for CE. This is however not the case because the consequences of massification are even greater in an ODL context given the openness to admissions for both undergraduate and postgraduate students which increases the number of students that each academic has to deal with.

The fourth role mentioned as defining an academic is postgraduate supervision. Findings indicated that academics in the CEDU appreciate the fact that they gain a wider understanding of their fields due to exposure to the variety of topics they are required to supervise. Consequently, they learn together with their students in relation both to content and research methodologies. However, again the openness to admissions leads to the registration of more postgraduate students than academics can comfortably supervise (see Chapter 5: 5.2.3). This situation leads to academics having to supervise topics they are unfamiliar with or topics that are not directly related to their areas of specialisation. While this is the case, academics are also expected, and they also want, to co-publish with their students on the resulting postgraduate research. Consequently, such publishing may sometimes be on topics that are not related to academics' areas of specialisation. This situation becomes a challenge when academics apply for NRF rating (see footnote 6) where each applicant must show specialisation in a specific field or discipline. Publication in a variety of fields or topics is seen by the NRF as a lack of academic focus and therefore it stands in the way of success in terms of achieving NRF rating.

The fifth responsibility is academic citizenship. Although academics engage in a number of academic citizenship practices as required for their academic identity development (academic citizenship is one of the roles that academics should fulfil and one prescribed by the IPMS), the excessive workload experienced by academics is a challenge for them

to meet this requirement. Although literature indicates excessive workload as a challenge in other HE contexts as well (cf. Anderson 2006; Gonzalez et al. 2014), the open admissions which are beyond academics' capacity in the ODL CEDU is perceived as increasing the pressure to attend to the required activities for academic citizenship and other responsibilities of academe (see Chapter 5: 5.2.4).

Other practices such as chairing academic committees, securing funding for research projects and contributing to innovating practices in research are also categorised as academic leadership practices. The analysis of academics' responses to the execution of academic leadership practices confirms Frisvoll's (2012: 449) assertion that power constitutes reality. Although academic leadership practices are mainly considered activities to be engaged in by associate professors and professors when the IPMS is administered, passion and dedication leads academics in the lower grades to become involved in academic leadership roles (see Chapter 5: 5.2.5). This situation is interpreted as an indication that academic identity construction also depends on academics' 'power to' exercise their autonomy on how they want to develop themselves as academics (cf. Wartenberg 1990). They are able to transcend the range of practices which are expected by the Institution through policy and monitored through the IPMS. In this way these individuals, from whom academic leadership is not required, create their own space for practice and thereby exceed their general academic obligations.

Administrative activities in academic institutions generally fall into two categories, namely, those that are the responsibility of academics, such as the development of TLs and tuition material, and those that are not academic in nature and which should be done by non-academic staff. Administration becomes a problem when academics find themselves doing work that is administratively not their responsibility. For example, different offices and individuals in the College request similar information from academics (such as a list of publications, conferences attended, student supervision, CE projects and other related academic involvement) and the opinion is that this information should be kept on a central database and be sent by an administrator to all offices where and when it is needed (see Chapter 5: 5.2.6). Being required to be involved in such repetitive tasks such as providing the same information in differing formats for different offices consumes academics' time which could have been more

appropriately spent on academic work and academic identity development than on repeatedly attending to the same task (cf. Ylijoki 2013 in Chapter 3).

Although it is not necessarily a role in a manner that the academic roles presented above are, background and academic grooming is another aspect that is regarded as playing a significant role in academic identity construction (Chapter 5: 5.3). Regardless of institutional policies and services emphasising either of the core academic functions, certain academics may be more inclined to select or focus on that role to which they had been exposed, are familiar with or to which they have a natural proclivity. However, the findings also showed that the South African national transformation agenda (cf. Sehoole 2006, see Chapter 1: 1.2) has led to the discontinuation of some academic disciplines in the Institution – implying that academics who had been groomed in those disciplines have had to rethink their identities by establishing themselves in new disciplines.

The final practice that was mentioned regarding the construction of academic identities in the CEDU is the manager in some section or department of the College. Academics who are managers do not have enough time to develop their academic identities in the way they would like to due to the demands of management (see Chapter 5: 5.4). While this is the case, the management positions they hold are not permanent. Therefore, it would be unwise of these managers to focus on the management positions that are temporary and disregard developing their identities through the mentioned roles and responsibilities of academics (cf. Preston & Price 2012). At the same time, they need to be competent or even excel in the management positions they hold to be exemplary to the colleagues under their leadership. Therefore their identity development is uniquely complicated.

From the summary above, it was interesting to note that while analyzing data to identify the manner in which academic identity is understood and constructed in the CEDU, the metaphorical space (in the form of time, choice of preferred practice and preferred space) for such identity construction emerged as either enabling or constraining as discussed in this summary of findings. However, with the process of academic identity construction clarified in the summary, the main concern of this study was to specifically

identify the conceptualisation of space and how space is experienced in relation to the practices mentioned in this section. The response to this question is summarized next.

## **RQ2: How is space conceptualised in the CEDU at UNISA?**

The analysis of findings to this question revealed the manner in which *policy* conceives of the *physical* space and how such space is *experienced* by those who conduct spatial practices. In other words, the analysis of findings showed the three dimensions of space suggested by Lefebvre (1991) and Soja (1996) as interconnected. Academics shared their experiences of particular spaces in which they construct their identities at UNISA such as in offices, administrative office spaces, and of spaces that affect the construction of their academic identities such as parking areas and the library. Findings showed that UNISA academic space comprises both professors' homes for PWFH and the University office space on the two campuses – UNISA main campus and VUDEC – for campus based academics. These parts of UNISA are experienced in different ways by different individuals, as discussed next.

Firstly, the home office is preferred by those who have been provided the opportunity to work from home because it offers flexibility in terms of working space and time compared to working in a campus based office. This finding is consistent with that of Kanuka et al. (2008) discussed in Chapter 3: 3.5.5 of this study. Flexibility at home is a consequence of the fact that it is possible to design the home space for both personal and professional work purposes. On the other hand, flexibility is minimal in the campus offices because of the way these offices are structured and the purpose that they were designed for, namely academic work only. The different purposes between that of the home and that of the on-campus office imply that the two kinds of offices have different meanings to their users (academics) (cf. Cresswell 2009: 2; Monnet 2011 in Chapter 2: 2.2.3). For example, while a PWFH may choose to work in pyjamas as long as he or she likes at home (see Chapter 6: 6.2.1.1), this is impossible on campus because of the meaning and the purpose of the on-campus office. While it is easy to change positions in the home space according to seasons and preference, such flexibility is not easy on campus because of the size of the office space. In other words, some practices and behaviours possible at home are inappropriate of the on-campus University space (cf. Cresswell 2009) as it is not possible to 'own' the campus office space as one can the home office space. Therefore, the University office space limits possibilities and preferences on space for academics.

However, while home space is preferred for the mentioned spatial and social reasons, it also has challenges. Firstly, at home social disruptions may affect the days' academic progress. PWFH are also prone to feelings of isolation since accessibility to colleagues is constrained due to the lack of direct contact with them. ICTs are problematic and PWFH experienced them as being inadequate (cf. Tustin 2014). The resolution of ICT problems is often experienced as protracted and problematic (see Chapter 6: 6.2.2.1). Secondly, PWFH are mandated by policy to avail themselves on campus once a week or as required by their immediate managers. However, there is no space on campus designated to PWFH when they meet this responsibility (see Chapter 6: 6.2.2.2). This nonexistence of space for PWFH is regarded as an inconsistency between what policy expects of these academics (to report on campus at least once a week) (Chapter 6: 6.2.2.2) and what is possible in practice on campus. It is not reasonable to be expected to be present on campus without a designated space to work from when on campus. In addition, some PWFH who tried to use what they perceived as sensible alternative space (in the absence of appropriate designated space) to converse with their postgraduate students have experienced humiliating and demeaning treatment in front of their students (Refer to Chapter 6: 2.2.2). Therefore, the nonexistence of space for PWFH is detrimental to the identities of the professors since they are exposed to humiliation that may possibly cause them to lose their students' confidence and respect.

With regard to working on campus, findings were consistent with Oyetunji's (2013) observation (see Chapter 3: 3.2.2) that offices may be unpleasant and unfavourable for the kind of work that one has to engage in in the work environment. Some office spaces in the CEDU are unpleasant or unfavourable due to an apparent lack of concern in some departments regarding the need to provide academics with the required resources and a pleasant working environment for carrying out their tasks. For the sake of making the environment pleasant, inviting and supportive to academic productivity, some academics bring personal items to their offices – to personalise the offices and create a relationship between personal and academic life. However, there are situations that are beyond academics' control, such as the ambient conditions related to temperature and noise in the CEDU offices. Especially during summer, academics find it difficult to work in their offices due to excessive heat. It was suggested that this situation may possibly retard academic productivity in summer (see Chapter 6: 2.2.2). The verification of this



suggestion was, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this study.

Noise from the corridors and at times from outside the building was also mentioned as making it difficult to engage in the thinking and reflection required of academics (Chapter 6: 6.3.2). Because of these conditions academics feel that the College and Institutional management are not giving the necessary attention to the space that academics should be provided with based on the kind of work that they do in the Institution.

The biggest inadequacy on campus is the shortage of office space for academics. There are more academics employed by the Institution than can be accommodated in the number of offices available. The shortage of appropriate office space has the following consequences in the CEDU:

- Some academics are obliged to share offices. Sharing offices is accompanied, in particular, by the lack of privacy and the possibility of exposure of personal or confidential information to the individuals with whom one shares an office. This finding is consistent with the arguments made against the use of open plan offices as discussed in Chapter 3: 3.2.2 (cf. Ashkanasy et al. 2014; Oyetunji 2013; Stern 2014). In this study it was suggested that conflict between academics sharing offices could be a consequence due to differences in personal needs. Therefore, due to the nature of the work they engage in, academics need individual offices that provide the quiet private space required for reflective, concentrated and confidential academic work (Chapter 6. 6.3.1). However, as a result of sharing office space and its consequences, the arrangement of the offices in some cases is done in consideration of privacy rather than preference and convenience for academic practices and productivity.
- Instead of showing concern for the welfare of academics under their leadership, some CODs were more concerned about academics' presence in their offices regardless of the discomforts experienced in the offices. The conclusion drawn from the concerns made about this issue is that academics need more than just a physical office space to work in – they also need to feel valued, respected and appreciated by their managers.

As a means of addressing the problem of the shortage of space in the main campus, some academics were relocated to the VUDEC building which is located some distance from the main campus close to the CBD. Relocation of academics to other buildings off-campus as a means of dealing with the shortage of office space was a welcomed move by some participants, especially those who did not have their own offices on the main campus (see Chapter 6: 6.3.4). Also, due to personal preferences regarding office space, some academics who had offices on the main campus volunteered for relocation to the off-campus location, VUDEC. This way they exercised their right to the space by choosing the space they preferred. However, relocation to the VUDEC building also had its own shortcomings. Firstly, academics from different departments rather than one specific department were relocated to the VUDEC. This strategy of ensuring that academics were provided with the necessary office space by isolating certain individuals from their colleagues unfortunately reduced the possibility for spontaneous discussions among colleagues of the same discipline. Such discussions are only possible when academics of the same discipline are located close together (Chapter 6: 6.3.4). Secondly, the other concern about being located in the VUDEC building was that academics were uncertain about the permanence of their relocation to that building. This caused academics to experience psychological and emotional anxiety that affected their ability to focus on academe.

In addition to the shortage of offices, there is insufficient administrative-office space for administrative work such as receiving and processing students' assignments and for holding academic meetings. This situation is frustrating and detrimental to the successful carrying of tasks for a number of reasons that will be outlined next.

- Receiving and processing students' assignments and correspondence are delayed;
- Identities of academics are put in jeopardy by the delays in receiving students' work since their competence in regard to providing a service to their students comes into question. Student-lecturer relations are also put at risk by these delays;
- Academics' offices are used to store materials that are supposed to be stored in designated administrative spaces thereby encroaching on their space and privacy;

- Spaces where academics used to meet informally for tea and for casual discussions and meetings beyond teatime have been re-purposed and many had been changed into academic or administrative office space. As a result, the possibility to generate ideas from those casual meetings which have the potential to give rise to collaborative research initiatives has been limited;
- The shortage of parking space for academics adds to the stress academics contend with on a daily basis and influences how they are able to approach and organise their day at work. Planning the day's work requires that an individual first needs to consider the prospects of finding parking. Academics who prefer working in the early morning hours at home are forced to rush to work to secure a parking space.

After the identification of the manner in which space is conceptualised and experienced in the CEDU, this study focused next on how the CEDU or UNISA policy supports the development of academics' identities within the space in which they work. The question was formulated as follows:

**RQ3: How do Institutional and College policies define and relate to the utilisation of space?**

The major findings to this question can be summarised as discussed below.

Firstly, there is an indication that the Institution, through what is stated in policy, appears to doubt the ability or commitment of academics below professorship level to work independently away from campus. Only professors are allowed to work from home as provided for in the PWFH initiative. The fact that individuals below the rank of professor are not given the option to work from home signifies a lack of trust in the professional commitment of lower ranking academics by the Institution. These academics are not trusted to be able to work independently as is the case with PWFH but need to be closely monitored on campus (see Chapter 7: 7.2). This situation can be likened to Saar and Palang's (2009: 9, see section 2.2.2, p. 31) analogy of power and ideology that a state may apply on people regarding the kinds of activities that should be done at particular times and spaces, thereby regulating everyday life of the inhabitants. This way people's activities are always under surveillance, a situation that may be described as implying lack of trust. This lack of trust is a constraint towards working as preferred. However,

even in cases where policy allows academics to work at home, for example in the few days' academic leave which can be applied for, some CODs have been described as being too strict in allowing such academic leave. These restrictions are experienced as ulterior to the Institutional policy (see Chapter 7: 7.2).

In addition, academics are required to be present in their offices for a stipulated number of hours and this implies that academics' daily schedule cannot be independently planned outside of the University's prescribed office hours. The imposition of these restrictions demonstrates a lack of trust in academics to comply with university regulations without the necessity to monitor them.

While there are these restrictions for academics in the CEDU, a number of opportunities create space for academic growth and development for academics. These include:

- Institutional policy providing metaphorical space for academics to develop quality curricula and learning materials. Such space is allowed through the provision of time dedicated to such endeavours and in the form of recognition of such practices as research output for the promotion of individuals to higher academic grades (see Chapter 7: 7.3.1; **Curriculum Policy, UNISA 2012: 19**);
- Academics assisted in the evaluation of their modules to ensure currency and relevance. At the same time, academics whose modules are current and relevant are highly esteemed by their students and other academics in their discipline;
- Providing funding to academics who meet specific criteria for the upgrading of their qualifications. Funding is also provided for the attendance of conferences even if academics do not have research funds at their disposal – a situation that was described as unique to UNISA;
- Awards for excellence in tuition and in research allocated to worthy candidates motivate academics in their work towards academic development.

With the constraining and enabling conditions of both the physical and the metaphorical space as stipulated in the conceived space, the next question looked at what academics

do as individuals in constructing their identities. This question was also addressed in this study.

#### **RQ4: How do academics' personality traits influence their response to Institutional and College policies on space?**

Basically five kinds of attitudes or values were found to either enable or constrain academics' space to work and construct their identities: compromise, reaction to challenges, religion, goal setting and dedication and determination (see chapter 7: 7.5). Some of these attitudes and values fit both in the Big Five personality and the narrow personality traits identified in Chapter 3 (Komarraju & Karau 2005: 558; Lounsbury et al. 2003). For example, conscientiousness is prominent among people with strong religious beliefs (Khoynezhad et al. 2012) as well as hard working and achievement oriented personalities (Erdheim et al. 2006). At the same time, working beyond the Institutional time for the sake of achieving particular goals may also be categorised as a narrow personality trait which is described by Patel (2011: 10) as work drive (See Chapter 3: 3.6). These identified traits indicate that while there are Institutional rules that may be constraining or enabling academics' practices, academics still have a personal role in shaping their own schedules towards achieving their goals in academe.

As indicated in the introduction of this chapter, the summary above is derived from the findings from the research questions that were developed in order to elucidate the main question which was: **How does space in a specific ODL context enable or constrain academic practices around which academics construct their identities?** Having explored these research questions, both in Chapters 6 and 7 as well as in the summary above, the next step is to address this main question by drawing conclusions from these findings.

### **8.3 THE RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS**

Space in the CEDU has both enabling and constraining effects for academics' identity construction and the discussion in this section is focused first on the enabling effects. Thereafter, the constraining effects of space will be discussed.

### **8.3.1 Enabling space for academic identity construction**

The analysis of the manner in which space is experienced by academics in the CEDU at UNISA indicates that there are various levels at which space is produced by the Institution. Firstly, space is produced as an imagined entity through the policies and directives that guide the designing and the allocation of offices to different colleges and departments. Secondly, space is produced as an imagined entity through directives and articulations regarding priorities related to the Institutional academic practices (such as the prioritisation of research over tuition). Thirdly, space is produced physically as built environments in which academics work. This third level of spatial production takes the form of professors' homes and the campus buildings. Fourth, as built environments, space continues to be produced by the Institution, again through the imaginings or policy on how space should be utilised by academics in fulfilling their duties. Although this study's findings revealed very limited participation of academics, as the users of space in conducting spatial practices, at these different levels of spatial production, their participation in the form of deciding and applying to work from home enables them to work autonomously and flexibly. PWFH are satisfied with the time, comfort, flexibility and autonomy they experience when working from home. The conclusion drawn from this observation is that participation in decision making about space is favourable for academic identity construction.

Again, although academics do not determine the priorities regarding Institutional practices, some of the consequences of such prioritisation are favourable for their academic identity construction. For example, the prioritisation of research over teaching has consequently led to the provision of funding and grants for various academic identity construction practices (such as conference attendance and academic qualifications improvement). Such funding and grants are unquestionably favourable for academics' development, especially in terms of research. In this regard, the onus is on academics to apply for the various opportunities offered to them and develop themselves accordingly.

The constraining experiences identified from the study are discussed next.

### **8.3.2 Constraining space for academic identity construction**

As indicated above, academics are not involved in the production of the metaphorical space regarding the Institutional academic priorities. Such priorities are determined by the global, the national and the Institutional motivations (see chapter 5: 5.3). Such motivations have led to the shift of the Institutional identity which in turn has compelled academics to rethink their academic identities in accordance with the global and the Institutional trends. Although some participants in this study have argued that academics tend to invest more in the roles they value most towards their identity development and that therefore, power is not concentrated at one point (at the global and the Institutional rules and regulations), but is dispersed to different levels of academe (cf. Foucault 1984) – this is not easy due to the fact that the Institution does not operate in isolation. The mission driven Institutional initiatives (cf. McInnis 2010: 153) in which the Institution is changing its historical identity to compete with research institutions are informed by the global trends in which HE has become corporatised. This trend, which is driven mainly by the motivation to generate finances for the institution (see chapter 5: 5.2.1), is a restriction for those academics who want to develop themselves as established HE teachers rather than researchers.

The fourth level of the production of space in the CEDU at UNISA (see section 8.3.1 above) compels academics to be in their offices for a specified number of hours. This situation is constraining and it limits the freedom and autonomy to work in a comfortable environment as imagined (and preferred and experienced) by the academics. It is thus a constraining ‘power over’ (Frisvoll 2012) as discussed in Chapter 2: 2.3. In this regard, space in the CEDU and the Institution is conceptualised as a container (cf. Lefebvre 1991) in which academics should spend such a specific number of hours in office, assumed to be working. No such control and restriction could be identified from the literature that was reviewed for this study. Cairns, McInnes and Roberts (2003: 128) talk of institutions and organisations where individuals are trained and conditioned to accept the “chronological, coordinated clock time as a necessary part of social life and a major element of organisation.” These authors, however, are not referring to a HE context. But, the form of conditioning they mention seems to be similar to what is experienced by academics in the CEDU. It is regarded by Foucault (1977) as a “technique of

discipline” in which power is hidden (see Chapter 2: 2.1.1). In other words, the conception of offices as space in which academics should be in for specific hours, without considering their own preferences, is a policy that hides power over those academics who prefer to work differently. It is some form of a *Panopticon*, Foucault’s (1977) metaphorical model of space management where prisoners are always under surveillance (see Chapter 2: 2.1.2). In this regard, it can be argued that academics’ right to appropriation as suggested by Lefebvre (1996: 158) is not fully accommodated. Instead, the economic value of space seems to be taking precedence over its utility value (Boer & de Vries 2009) because the more academics sit in their offices and attend to students’ queries at any time, the more students will be willing to enrol in the Institution.

In the next section I interpret academics’ experiences in relation to their role in the production of space for academic identity construction.

### **8.3.3 The imagined space within the experienced space**

Because academics construct their academic identities through the same practices that are mandated by the Institution and the CEDU, they produce their own spaces, both abstractly and physically – but at a different level from the four levels identified above (see section 8.4 below). Physically, those academics can work at home before the University hours or in office beyond the University’s official working hours. In this way, academics draw on their own power to make decisions that favour their endeavours towards their academic identity construction without relying only on the prescribed space and time.

Abstractly, academics imagine the spaces in and through which they can work better and be academically productive. These imagined spaces are at home for some academics and on campus for others. However, due to an apparent lack of trust in its employees in the CEDU, the Institution does not open a space for academics’ imaginings about space to develop to be the real spaces. This is especially the case for those academics who regard home space as more comfortable to work in than the campus space. It is only when they reach professorship level that these academics may apply to work from home and see their imagined spaces become reality. This situation



compels one to question the extent at which the ODL context is open for academics in the CEDU to work comfortably. The question is whether the ODL space is open at all and for whom it is open. It can be argued that the ODL space in the context of this study is probably open for students who are able to call at any time and find academics in their offices. But the openness of ODL seems to be questionable for academics who have to be in their offices for eight consecutive hours, in an ODL Institution.

This questionable openness of space does not come by surprise because the description of ODL in the ODL policy (UNISA, ODL policy 2008) mentions flexibility in terms of learning but not in terms of teaching or related academic practices. Therefore, it can be argued that this situation implies that the duty of academics is to provide space and time for students' success by making their own time and space subservient. Having said that, the implications of this study's findings are presented in the following section.

#### **8.4 IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This section addresses the **RQ5: How should space be managed or created for optimal academic identity construction in the College?** The findings from this study address this question by suggesting implications of findings for policy, for practice and for theory. Based on these implications, recommendations are made.

**Regarding policy:** The first implication for the findings is that space in the CEDU is a tool of power (Lefebvre 1991). Various modes of power are identifiable from the findings. Firstly, through its power as vested by the Institutional policy, the CEDU produces space for the College academics. For various reasons presented in the findings and discussed above, the produced space is sometimes experienced as composed of ideologies that are oppressive to the users (academics) (cf. Saar & Palang 2009: 8). Secondly, academics use and critique the produced space and as they do that, they produce their own abstract spaces. Criteria on which academics base their critique of the produced space have emerged. Those criteria include: the conditions of space and the academics' time for the use of space. The recommendations made below are based on such criteria as suggested by participants in this study. Concerning the conditions of space:

- Academics prefer temperature controlled offices so that they are able to focus on their work without being troubled by adverse ambient temperature fluctuations. This is their own imaginings of an effective space for academic identity construction – their Thirdspace. It is recommended that the Institution should consider installing air conditioners in academics' offices in the CEDU. Such installation would be an investment for the Institution since, if temperature fluctuations impact on academics' productivity, such productivity would duly increase if air conditioners are installed.
- Academics problematize the non-existence of space for casual meetings and limited space for formal meetings in the CEDU. It is recommended that as the College should secure space for academics and their activities and consideration should be made to provide every school in the CEDU with a fully functional meeting room. Due to the shortage of space, the recommended meeting room may be made accessible for both formal and informal meetings.
- Noise is inappropriate for the kind of work that academics are required to engage in which requires inter alia in reflection, critical thinking and knowledge production. It is thus recommended that academics' offices should be soundproofed to facilitate the comfortable execution of these activities. The other option is that the noisy activities may be embarked on after hours so as not to disturb academics.
- Academics prefer comfortable and aesthetic offices because they spend the best part of their days in their office. The recommendation in this regard is that the CEDU should identify a specific office to which academics may send their requisitions about office resources, including ergonomic furniture. Also, when management allocates a new office to an academic, the manager should ensure that the individual is settled and provided with the necessary resources and facilities and communicate and interact with the individual in this regard.
- Because office space is limited on campus, academics should be allowed to work from home regardless of their academic rank. Presently, the alternative to address the lack of office space is for academics to share offices. The research has demonstrated that the sharing of office space is problematic and not experienced positively. Should it not be feasible to allow academics of all ranks the opportunity to work from home, the possibility that they will be required to share offices should be made known to academics at their

recruitment stage so that they may be in a position to make informed decisions about whether to accept appointments or not. It should not come by surprise to newly recruited employees, only after they have signed the contracts, that they will be sharing offices.

Concerning the official working hours, the issue of academics being office bound for the specified number of hours is awkward because the needs of academics are different from those of other employees in the Institution. Academics' time and space for work overlaps with their private space and time and this is disregarded by Institutional policy. The recommendation is that time should be specified for the submission of academics' work and output, but not necessarily for being in office. Working time towards such output and performance should be left to the academics' own discretion and planning. It should not be assumed that it is only when academics are physically present in their office that they will be productively engaged. In addition, it is assumed that more flexibility in terms of academics' office hours would also curtail the problem of parking space because not everybody would have to come to work on the same time. As the case is presently, there is consistency between the assumed or imagined need to keep academics below professorship in surveillance and the flexibility these academics need in order to be academically productive. Therefore, a serious transformation on the side of management on how space is managed in a postmodern era is required.

The other recommendation on this issue is that academics may be allowed to state in their TLs the times and days in which students may access them in office. The other days and times should be reserved for research and other academic work at academics' own discretion.

Further, because the findings from this study suggest that some academics who are not professors prefer to work at home and that some PWFH prefer to work on campus, it is recommended that the Institution should consider opening a space to exercise choice in this regard. Such a choice may be allowed for all academics with terms and conditions for working either on campus or from home. These terms and conditions should not be a problem considering that the work and worth of academics is already quantified in the present neoliberal Institutional dispensation. Therefore, the Institution may state the requirements for academics to qualify to work from home in terms of performance other

than reaching professorship. Again, allowing academics the choice to work from home would assist in curtailing the parking space problems in the Institution.

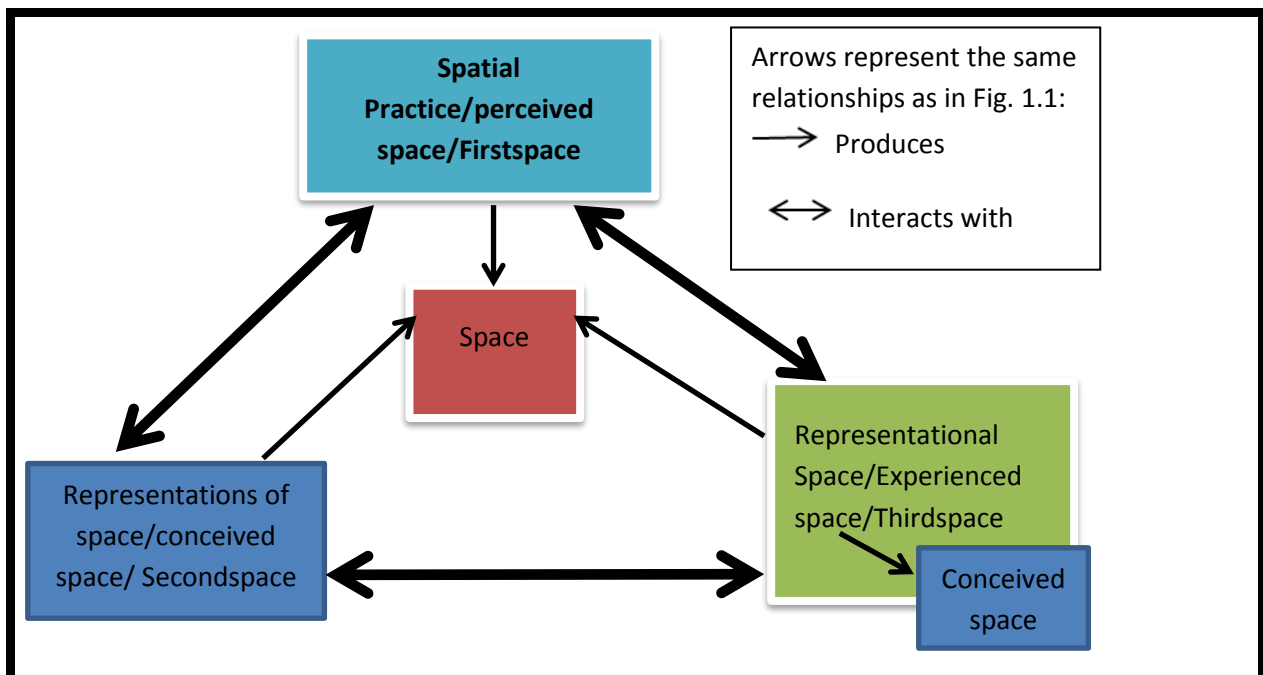
**Regarding practice:** Firstly, the findings show that semesterisation of tuition is problematic for the ODL Institution. Therefore, the issue of semesterisation should be reconsidered because it limits the time for academics to be creative in a way that develops not only them but also their students. Time is consumed by the sending and receiving of students' work during the semester, a situation that differs from the contact institutions where students are on campus.

Secondly, there is a strong feeling from academics that the discussion classes and video conferencing were advantageous and benefited students. Furthermore, academics who excelled and enjoyed involvement in these activities lost a space for academic self-development after the curtailment of these practices. It is thus, recommended that the Institution should consider bringing back these tuition practices.

Thirdly, the findings suggest that academics do not have the freedom to choose which academic role they prefer to focus on and subsequently they are compelled to rethink their academic identities in accordance with the Institutional priorities. It is thus, recommended that academics should have the opportunity to identify their academic strengths and to team up accordingly for their academic self-development. The university policy allows for team work as discussed in Chapter 5.

Fourthly, the situation where ICTs are problematic for the PWFH is regarded as a major inconsistency between how ODLs should function and the experiences of the PWFH regarding the way they are able to work with the requisite ICTs. The biggest problem identified by participants is that the ICT problems jeopardise their reputation with their students because communication with students gets delayed by the problems related to ICTs. Students expect communication with academics to be on time and they are unaware of the ICT challenges. The recommendation is that the Institution should invest in improving technology for academics working from home. The lack of functional ICTs also impacts on academic tasks such as research reporting on progress and research planning.

**Regarding theory:** The two major spatial theories that were used as lenses for the analysis of space agree that space is imagined through maps, designs and plans (and policies) – this being one of the dimensions of space. In this study, findings suggest that the Secondspace or conceived space is also imagined in the Thirdspace, that is, at the experienced space level. As soon as individuals begin to experience the conceived space (in policy) in the Firstspace (the real, the physical), they start creating their own imaginings about space at that experience level. Therefore, the experienced space should be viewed as containing the imaginations about space. The difference is that at the level of individuals' experiences the imagined space does not always result in the real or physical space (the spaces where academics want to work), that which can be observed and measured, due to power relations between the Institutional and College policies and academics, especially those at ranks lower than professorship. The implication for this observation is that the triadic space may be extended to include conceived items at the experienced space level as demonstrated in Fig 8.1.



**Fig. 8.1 Conceived space within the representational**

Therefore, this study's findings suggest that the Institution should adopt a postmodern model to address the challenges of space management. Such a model entails a post-panoptic approach where academics' voices would be taken into consideration regarding where and how they prefer to work rather than a top-down approach that presently prevails.

## **8.5 CONTRIBUTIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This research has contributed knowledge in the field of HE space in relation to the way in which academic staff experience space as they construct their academic identities in an ODL context. It was indicated in Chapter 1: 1.1 that there is scant research on the experiences of academics about space in HE, especially in an ODL context. It was stated that most research about space in HE is focused on students' experiences of space but even that is mainly regarding contact institutions. This study has contributed knowledge to this gap by presenting academics' experiences and prospects of space and its allocation and utilisation in a particular college of an ODL Institution. It would be interesting however to compare these findings with how space is experienced by academics in the contact institutions, a topic that was beyond the scope of this study.

The study has also extended Lefebvre's spatial triad by adding the imaginations or conceptions about space at the experienced space level. This extension, it is hoped, will be reflected on by other spatial theorists as they analyse spatial issues in their own contexts.

This study was also not intended to measure the outcome of academic practices quantitatively against the effect of space in the CEDU. Instead it was meant to examine academics' perspectives and experiences of space in relation to how academics work towards developing their identities. It would be useful to conduct a quantitative study that measures academic output against the criteria that were mentioned in the implications of the findings. Also, it is still not known how students and administrative staff experience space as they construct their own identities in the Institution. Such research could put into perspective some of the experiences shared by academics in this study. For example, while academics complain about the curtailing of discussion classes and video conferences, students' views on this matter have not been explored

or established.

## 8.6 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this chapter a reflection was made on the study's research findings by summarising and discussing those findings against literature and theory. The consistencies as well as differences between findings and literature were identified with conclusions and implications for practice, theory and policy drawn from such discussions. The recommendations were also made for practice and policy regarding the manner in which space can be managed or created for optimal academic identity construction in the CEDU. In summary, this study succeeded in establishing the manner in which space in the CEDU enables and constrains academic practices around which academics construct their identities. The findings showed that although the institution is ODL, space matters in the development of academics' identities. The different dimensions of space affect and are affected by academics' practices and therefore need to be acknowledged in the planning and management of space in the College and the Institution. It is hoped that the recommendations made in this study will be taken seriously by the College and the Institutional authorities for the possible improvement of academic practices and the development of academics' identities.

*Space in the university is what it is as a result of the decisions and actions of its designers, its users, those who manage it in various ways and those who look after it. But may there also be a sense in which space and place help to determine what the university is?* (Temple 2009: 209).



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## **Appendix 1: The process of coding**

### **Code-Filter: All**

---

HU: My Project  
File: [C:\Users\madiyn\Documents\Space for PhD\Data\Data analysis\2015\My Project.hpr7]  
Edited by: Super  
Date/Time: 2015-02-17 08:48:48

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#### **BAR BACKGROUND AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**BAR: Background**

**BAR: Purpose**

**BAR: Recommendation**

#### **CBAUS CONSTRAINTS BY ADMIN AND UNIVERSITY STRUCTURE**

**Administration**

**Condition**

**Disadvantage**

**Disturbance**

**Equality**

**Exam scripts and assignments**

**Gatekeeping**

**Globalisation**

**Higher education guidelines**

**Isolation**

**Items in the corridor**

**Open air**

**Rubbish bin**

**Steel cabinet**

**Table in the corridor**

**University location**

**University structure**

#### **CBM CONSTRAINTS BY MANAGEMENT**

**Academic freedom**

**CBM: Accessibility**

**CBM: Approval**

**CBM: Boxes**

**CBM: Bullying**

**CBM: Bureaucracy**

**CBM: Change**

**CBM: collegiality**

**CBM: Coming to campus**

**CBM: Confining space**

**CBM: Conforming**

**CBM: Consultation**

**CBM: Counterproductivity**  
**CBM: Departmental space**  
**CBM: Discrimination**  
**CBM: Disrespect**  
**CBM: Easy solution**  
**CBM: Ethics Review Policy**  
**CBM: Exclusion**  
**CBM: Favouritism**  
**CBM: Financial gains**  
**CBM: Flexible hours**  
**CBM: Former meeting room**  
**CBM: Information overload**  
**CBM: Job satisfaction**  
**CBM: Lack of trust**  
**CBM: Main campus distance**  
**CBM: Management**  
**CBM: Non-office space**  
**CBM: Office condition**  
**CBM: Office sharing**



## **Appendix 2: Participants identification questionnaire**

This questionnaire is designed to assist me in selecting information rich participants for my study. Please make a cross on the item that applies to you.

### **Your College at UNISA**

**CEDU**

**CEMS**

**CSET**

### **Your Department in the College**

- Biographical details

#### ***What is your academic level?***

- 1.1 Professor
- 1.2 Associate Professor
- 1.3 Senior Lecturer
- 1.4 Lecturer
- 1.5 Junior Lecturer
- 1.6 Other (specify)

#### ***How long have you been an academic at UNISA?***

- 1.7 More than 20 years
- 1.8 10 – 20 years
- 1.9 5 – 10 years
- 1.10 Less than 5 years

#### ***What management position do you hold in the college/department?***

- 1.11 The Dean
- 1.12 The Director
- 1.13 The COD
- 1.14 No management position
- 1.15 Other (please specify)

#### ***Do you hold a doctoral degree?***

- 1.16 Yes
- 1.17 No, still in progress
- 1.18 No, still doing Masters
- 1.19 No, Not studying

- **Teaching and research**

***Where is your office located?***

1.20 On campus

1.21 At home

***Do you share an office?***

1.22 Yes, with another  
academic

1.23 Yes, with a non-academic  
staff member/s

1.24 No

***Has your research output met the university expectations in the last academic year?***

1.25 Yes

1.26 Yes and exceeded

1.27 No

1.28 No, no output at all

***How many students do you have in your largest group?***

By filling in this questionnaire, I assume that you are interested in participating in my study. I will therefore need to interview you and observe your space. May you therefore kindly provide me with your office number in the space below as well as your telephone extension?

Office (e.g. AJH 7-34)

Extension (e.g. 4698)

Thank you very much for your will to participate in my study.

### **Appendix 3: Observation schedule**

- Where the office is located (home or campus);
- The geographic direction the windows face;
- Its average size in relation to the furniture in it;
- Ventilation;
- Daily time in and time out;
- Accessories in the office (decorations, colour, ...);
- Activities during the day;

ASK QUESTIONS RELATED TO EXPERIENCES OF THIS SPACE...

#### **OBSERVATION DEPARTMENTAL SPACES FOR INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS**

- Physical space/s used in the department (e.g. seminar rooms; tea rooms...) – size, ventilation, light, etc;
- Frequency of meetings (ask participants how this affects their metaphorical space)
- Opportunities for participation/contribution in academic gatherings (e.g. who decides on the agenda...);
- Interaction with colleagues in the department (participants only);
- Interaction and collaboration with colleagues in other departments (participants only);
- Number of time outs during the day and purpose (participants only);
- Content of formal and informal conversations (participants only).

#### Appendix 4: An interview schedule

- **GENERAL**

- Please tell me about yourself – where you come from, where your academic career started and what brought you to UNISA.
- What are your duties and responsibilities at Unisa?
- How many academics report to you at work?<sup>9</sup>

- **ACADEMIC IDENTITY**

- In your view, what does being an academic entail?
- With your present academic/leadership position, is it easy to do practices that enrich/grow your identity as an academic? Explain.

- **METAPHORICAL SPACE/opportunities/choices/freedom**

- **Teaching**

- How many modules are you involved in? What is your role in the modules (e.g. co-ordinator)?
- Are all the modules in your area of specialisation?
- How many students do you have in each of the modules?
- How often do you communicate with your students?
- Which mode of communication do you use most? Why?
- Do you have scheduled time for communicating with students or do you communicate with them anytime?
- How does communicating with students affect your other daily academic practices?
- What do the university/departmental policy/ies expect of you with regard to communicating with students?
- Do you have space (freedom or power) to do your teaching the way you want to? Please explain.
- Given a chance, what would you change about the way you do your teaching?

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<sup>9</sup> Questions for academics in management positions are highlighted.

- **RESEARCH AND POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISION**

- How many articles (and/or other research output) are you expected to produce per year?
- How many do you produce per year?
- With many other responsibilities that you have (e.g. teaching), how do you make time to do your research?
- Are there policies related to research which you think affect you with regard to this practice – both positively and negatively?
- What other research related activities are you involved in? (e.g. CE)
- Why are you (not) involved in these activities? (is it your choice or policy?)
- How much chance do you have of building working relationships with academics in other departments/colleges/ institutions?
- How do you create such chances? Or what mechanisms or structures are in place in your department/college to support you in creating such chance?
- How many postgraduate students do you supervise?
- Are they all researching in your field of specialisation?
- How does supervising these students affect your daily practices and your growth as an academic?
- Generally, do you have space (freedom and power) to do your research and postgraduate supervision the way you want to?
- Given a chance, what would you change about the way you do your research and postgraduate supervision and how?

- **PHYSICAL SPACE**

- Has your office always been arranged/ organized this way or have you been moving it around at some points?
- If you move it around some times, why do you do that? What motivates you?
- What makes you feel that you are now in the right position in your office?
- Have you ever moved offices during your period of working at Unisa?
- How do you make this office work for you?
- What's important for you in this office? Why
- Is your office size, shape, view, ventilation etc. conducive for your work as an academic? Explain
- Besides this office, What other physical spaces in the Institution matter to you/ affect your daily practices – (e.g parking)?

- How do these spaces affect your daily practices such as research, teaching, student supervision and the like?
- What is your view with regards to academics having to be in offices during the working hours?
- How do you manage the physical presence of academics that report to you in their offices?
- Given a chance, what would you change about these spaces?
- How much do academics that report to you get affected by the physical space on a daily basis?
- Are there mechanisms or structures in your department/college that are in place to support the affected academics?

### **ABSTRACT/IMAGINED SPACE**

- Which space related policy/ies in the University or College affect your daily practices, e.g. physical presence in your office?
- How do these policies affect your daily practices?
- How do they affect academics that report to you?
- Given a chance, what would you change about these policies?

Is there anything else related to my topic that you would like to share with me?

**I thank you for your time**

## **Appendix 5: Editing letter**

This is to confirm that the doctoral thesis: **Space and academic identity construction in a higher education context: a self-ethnographic study**, by Nomanesi Madikizela-Madiya, Unisa Student number: 3645-056-1 has been edited for language use and technical aspects.



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**12 January 2016**

**Letter from Editing**